

Nye Farrabas

a
walk
on
the
inside

50 year
retrospective



Figure 1: *Garden Piece, Highland Street*. Nye Ffarrabas. 1989. Photography: Nye Ffarrabas.
Upper left: March 8. Upper right: April 19. Lower left: July 2. Lower right: July 28.

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Nye Ffarrabas: a walk on the inside: 50 year retrospective

Artist, Poet, and Author: Nye Ffarrabas

Editor: Adam Silver

Designer: Cai Xi Silver

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Judson Memorial Church for passages from *Memories of Judson House*, eds. Elly Dickason and Jerry G. Dickason (New York: Judson Church, 2000), 321-325, gathered online at judson.org/images/Judson_House_68_Nye_Ffarrabas.pdf.

Hansjörg Mayer for passages from *Mr. Fluxus: A Collective Portrait of George Maciunas 1931-1978*. Edited by Emmett Williams, Ann Noel, and Ay-O. (London: Hansjörg Mayer / New York: Thames & Hudson, 1998), 304-307.

Something Else Press for reprinting a page from *The Friday Book of White Noise* and the passage included in the present volume's Afterword, both items by Nye/Bici and previously published in John Cage's *Notations* (New York: Something Else Press, 1969), 131, 241, 244.

Black Thumb Press for all writings and documents produced by Bici Hendricks, Bici Forbes, and Nye Ffarrabas.

All images are of work by Nye Ffarrabas (formerly known as Bici Forbes, Bici Forbes Hendricks and Bici Hendricks) unless otherwise indicated. All works depicted are in the collection of author/owner Nye Ffarrabas at time of publication unless otherwise indicated.

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Dimensions are in inches (and centimeters); height precedes width precedes depth.

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a walk on the inside
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Artist, Poet, Author: Nye Ffarrabas

Designer: Cai Xi and Adam Silver

Editor: Adam Silver

Foreword: Ken Friedman

Preface: Jacquelynn Baas

Introduction: Hannah Higgins

Contributors: Tyche Hendricks, Bracken Hendricks

Jon Hendricks, Sur Rodney (Sur), Geoff Hendricks,

Kendra Mackenzie, Beth Anderson,

Clarinda Mac Low, Sue Brearey, Yoko Ono,

Iriz Lezak, Anne Tardos, Mieko Shiomi, Carolee Schneemann

C.X. Silver Gallery LLC

Brattleboro, Vermont

2014



Figure 2: Bici Forbes Hendricks (now, Nye Ffarrabas), January 1, 1967. Photo by Peter Moore © Barbara Moore/Licensed by VAGA, NY

Fifty Years of Nye Ffarrabas

Ken Friedman

This exhibition is a fifty-year retrospective of the work of Nye Ffarrabas. I say fifty years, more or less, because there has been more of her, and less.

The person that Nye Ffarrabas used to be was Bici Forbes. Bici was an artist and a member of the laboratory for art, music, and design known as Fluxus. Born in 1932, the body that now contains Nye has walked the surface of our planet for eighty-two years.

The artist who was Bici Forbes who became Nye Ffarrabas made an art that integrated life in a deep and peculiarly Fluxus way. She left far more than fifty years of footprints behind her in the world. So it's more than fifty years we celebrate here.

The artist Nye Ffarrabas has had that name for fewer than fifty years, so there is less to celebrate as well. As is often the case, less is more.

Nye is a legend, in the best sense of the word. The Oxford English Dictionary recounts some of those best senses: “The story of the life of a Saint; a collection of saints’ lives or of stories of a similar character; a story, history, account; a roll, list, record...”

When I first knew her, Nye was a name on the Fluxus mailing lists that George Maciunas used to send. Bici published Black Thumb Press together with Geoff Hendricks. I must have met her once or twice, but I don't remember when – I lived in California during most of the 1960s and 1970s, though I traveled across most of the United States and half of Canada doing projects and encouraging museums without success to exhibit the work of artists like Bici, Geoff, and George. In those days, I had a more optimistic view of the art world, and the utterly mistaken notion that one might use art as a vehicle of change.

But Bici and people like her made the world a better place. Whether or not the world changed around them as much as it might have done in an imaginary past, Bici made good things happen. Much of Bici's work survives in verbal propositions and letters. One of my favorite works by Bici is not in this show. It's a letter held by the Harvard University Center for Medical History.¹ In it, Bici commends a young woman who hopes to be a physician to Leona Baumgartner. Dr. Baumgartner saved the letter for decades before giving it to Harvard.

One of my favorite works by Bici Forbes was an egg cased in plaster. Jean Brown had it in her collection at The Shaker Seed House – it had an event score stamped on it: “Egg/Time Event. One hen egg. Do not open for 100 years.” I have a vague memory of talking about 100-year eggs with Jean while touching the simple,



Figure 3.
Freeze-Dry the Hudson / Kleine Stücke
Cologne 1970, paper, ink, text
dimensions variable

slightly rough surface of the plaster. We talked about that egg a lot. Jean's egg is at The Getty Institute, along with several other works of art that have long since made their century.

Hannah Higgins wrote me about the egg a couple days ago – this egg was a work with resonance. Hannah and Bici's kids talked about their experience as "Fluxkids" in a fascinating article.³ Bici Forbes was already Nye Ffarrabas by then. The article isn't about Nye – but like that letter in Leona Baumgartner's papers, this says a lot about Bici's footprints and the world that took shape around her.

How Bici became Nye has never been clear to me, and I don't know when or how this happened. I moved to Finland in 1987, then to Norway and I slowly lost touch with the art world. I still see individual friends from time to time, but I haven't been to and of the Fluxus exhibitions or festivals where I might run into Nye since 1992.⁴

When Adam Silver wrote me about Nye's retrospective, I agreed to write immediately. I've always loved Bici's work – and Nye's. I did not realize how hard it would be to say something about the work itself. I've had a difficult time writing about art and especially about Fluxus. In the past five years, I've written a book chapter⁵ and a journal article⁶. Both took ages. That said, it seems to me that Nye represents the best of what Fluxus might have been – or possibly will become.

Nye Ffarrabas is an artist who became a psychotherapist who is once again (or always was) an artist. On the web site hosted by the Associated Psychotherapists of Vermont, Nye's page⁷ mentions that her practice includes metaphysical inquiry. It's that egg again, and the question of which came first.

When I looked at the images and works to be included in this show, memories of the past overwhelmed me. These recalled things that came in the mail long ago to describe events that took place in New York when I lived in California. Images suggested a sense of earth and a rooted presence. Two historical figures came to mind.

Han Shan is one of the people I think of when I think of Nye in Brattleboro. A Zen poet and author of the Cold Mountain poems,^{8,9,10} Han Shan was a T'ang Dynasty poet and hermit. There is little historical information about Han Shan. According to T'ang Dynasty governor Lu-Ch'iu Yin,¹¹ Han Shan wrote over 300 poems on rocks, walls, trees, and bamboo around the province. When the governor sent men to find Han Shan and his sidekick Shih-Te, they ran off into the hills, disappearing from the world of mortal affairs to remain a memory among those who met them once or twice and a legend to those who came later.

Ludwig Wittgenstein is the other person I think of when I think of Nye. He was also a sometime-hermit specializing in metaphysical inquiry.

Proposition 6.54 of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* is this: "My propositions serve as elucidations in the following way: Anyone who understands me, finally recognizes them as nonsensical, when he has used them as steps to climb up beyond them. (He must, so to speak, throw away the ladder, after he has climbed up it) . . . He must transcend these propositions and then he will see the world aright."

Bici Forbes climbed up the ladder. Nye Ffarrabas threw the ladder away.

Ken Friedman is University Distinguished Professor at Swinburne University of Technology in Melbourne, Australia. He is Guest Professor at the Tongji University in Shanghai, Adjunct Professor at James Cook University in Townsville, Australia, and a Fellow of The Policy Lab of Boston, Massachusetts. Ken Friedman is also a practicing artist and designer active in the international laboratory of art, design, music, and architecture known as Fluxus. He had his first solo exhibition in New York in 1966. His work is represented in major museums and galleries around the world, including the Museum of Modern Art and the Guggenheim Museum in New York, the Tate Gallery in London, the Hood Museum of Art at Dartmouth College, and Stadtsgalerie Stuttgart.

Notes.

1. Hendricks, Bici. 1967. "Letter from Bici Hendricks to Leona Baumgartner, M.D." *The Stethoscope Sorority: Stories from the Archives for Women in Medicine*. Center for the History of Medicine. <http://collections.countway.harvard.edu/onview/items/show/5892>
2. Hendricks, Bici. Two editions: 1966 and 1967. Egg/time event. Plaster cube with red ink rubber stamp markings on the top: "EGG/TIME EVENT, ONE HEN EGG, DO NOT OPEN, FOR 100 YEARS, FEB 22 1967." ca. 9.3 x 9.8 x 9.5 cm. Jean Brown Papers. Getty Research Institute.
3. Higgins, Hannah. 2005. "Fluxkids." *Visible Language*. Vol. 39 Issue 3, 248-277.
4. There was one exception to this since 1992. Bertrand Clavez persuaded me to come to a symposium at the Convent de La Tourette, the Dominican monastery designed by Le Corbusier and Iannis Xenakis. Bertrand promised me that I could spend my time in the monastery. He said that I wouldn't meet any Fluxus artists there, so I agreed to come. Now that wasn't entirely true. A few days later, Bertrand told me that Ben Patterson was coming. Since Ben is the most widely travelled among all Fluxus artists, he is the closest thing we have to a travelling Dominican preaching friar. As Ben could have been at La Tourette without Fluxus, it seemed to me I could safely attend the symposium. I am glad that I did, as Ben gave a wonderful performance at a Fluxconcert in the chapel.
5. Friedman, Ken. 2011. "Fluxus: A Laboratory of Ideas." *Fluxus and the Essential Qualities of Life*. Jacquelynn Baas, editor. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 35-44. (Exhibition and catalogue honored as best university gallery exhibition of the year in 2011 by the International Association of Art Critics, North American Section.) PDF reprint available at: <https://swinburne.academia.edu/KenFriedman>
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7. Ffarrabas, Nye. 2014. <http://www.psych-vt.org/nye-ffarrabas/> [Address and phone number have changed from what is in that listing. - Ed.]
8. Han Shan. 2003. *Poems of Han Shan*. Translated by Peter Hobson. With an Introduction by T. H. Barrett. Walnut Creek, California: AltaMira Press.
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10. Snyder, Gary. 1966. *Riprap & Cold Mountain Poems*. San Francisco: Four Seasons Foundation.
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Preface

Jacquelynn Baas

I was pulled into the gravity field of Nye Ffarrabas's lively mind around 2010, in the process of developing the exhibition and book *Fluxus and the Essential Questions of Life* for the Hood Museum of Art at Dartmouth College. A Dartmouth friend told me that a friend had told her that one of the original Fluxus artists was still working away in nearby Vermont under a different name. The artist in question turned out to be Nye Ffarrabas, formerly Bici Forbes Hendricks, who among other things was a presenter at the 1967 *Twelve Evenings of Manipulations* at the Judson Gallery. On another day, at Kate Millett's "manipulation" titled "No!" (whose purpose was to trap unsuspecting participants in a large wooden cage), Nye Ffarrabas was one of the trapped, but not for long: in short order, Nye escaped by climbing over the top of the rather tall cage. She later recalled the moment:

This was the first occasion at Judson in which I felt seized by the energy of the matter at hand in a way that took me very much by surprise.¹

Nye seems to me to occupy an ongoing, open-minded, creative state of surprise. It is not surprising, therefore, to learn that one of Nye's resources has been Buddhism. The teachings of the Buddha were designed to generate "beginner's mind"—the mind of surprise—in practitioners, enabling them to respond creatively rather than reactively to life's events. This current show of Nye Ffarabas's work, appropriately titled *A Walk On the Inside*, lets us occupy this space of surprise, the space of art, right along with her.

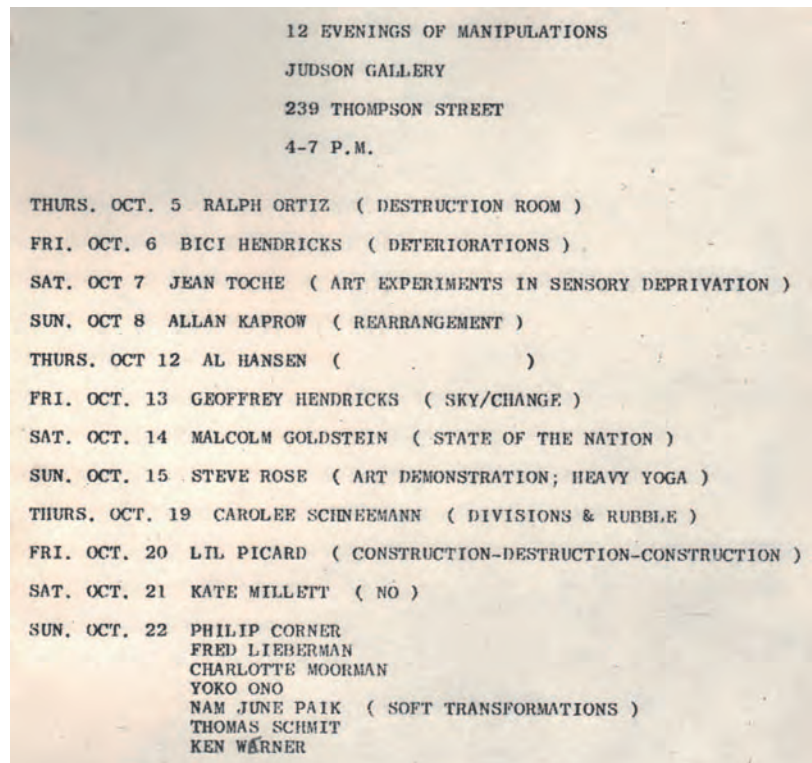


Figure 4.
12 EVENINGS OF MANIPULATIONS.
program. typed photocopy, collection of
the author (Nye Ffarrabas)

Jacquelynn Baas (PhD University of Michigan) was the founding director of the Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth College, and director of the University of California Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive, where she still serves as Director Emeritus. In 2000 Baas cofounded the arts consortium, *Awake: Art, Buddhism, and the Dimensions of Consciousness*, which over the course of its five-year existence generated some fifty exhibitions, educational programs, artist residencies, and two books. She has organized over thirty exhibitions, including *Fluxus and the Essential Questions of Life* (2011) for the Hood Museum of Art, voted "Best Show in a University Gallery" by the International Association of Art Critics.

1. Nye Ffarrabas (formerly Bici Forbes Hendricks) in, *Memories of Judson House*, eds. Elly Dickason and Jerry G. Dickason (New York: Judson Church, 2000), 326.

Egg/Time Event: A Meditation

Hannah B. Higgins

EGG

The plaster cube is roughly the size of half a standard brick slightly larger than the palm of my smallish hand. Over the course of fifty years, the edges of the cube have softened. There are a few missing corners. It looks like it took a tumble once or twice. My finger traces a ding here, a divot there from a fingernail, an errant piece of hardware, a book, or a box.



Figure 5: *Egg/Time Event*, plaster and egg, 1966, collection of the author (Hannah Higgins). Photo: Hannah Higgins.

A missing edge obscures (by poetic absence) a something that ends in “.... YEARS.” The sides are blackened, I suspect by the unwashed hands of artists and children. Red rubberstamp letters march in a slightly out of kilter lock-step around the top: “ONE HEN EGG” says one side, “DO NOT OPEN” the next, “... YEARS”, the third, and finally, “EGG/TIME EVENT” is stamped steadily across the fourth. To know who made the piece requires turning it over. “BICI HENDRICKS,” it reads, a long ago discarded name absorbed by another name, Bici Forbes, and finally by Nye Ffarrabas. To read one is to see them all inside one another, like the hen egg inside this plaster cube.

An egg is forever suspended here. Or rather, the egg was once, when the plaster flowed with poured life, a lifelike pool that mimicked the goopy insides of the white egg almost 50 years ago. First the plaster hardened, gripping the eggshell and its lugubri-

ous protein in a hardening fist, a fist slowly exceeded in hardness by the petrifying egg deep in its core. The egg's once translucent miasma would now be a shiny brown pitch encasing a black pit; sunny yellow yolk morphing into a hardened heart. I give it a shake. By rattling the block, I sound the yolk, the white, and the broken shell.

I shake it again, but the piece is mute. It makes no sound at all. Refusal. Rejection. Perhaps this small object was once a hardening womb, the plaster warming as it set, mimicking the warming pulse of a hen's heart, only to turn cold and impassive around the emerging life form, denying it. But such a cruel read misses the mark. Egg time is female. I am convinced. Ovulation is a form of egg-time, after all, of the egg and/or the body that builds it, and drops it into a void or into itself depending on the chemical signature of the egg in time. A public chorale about women's bodies and women's rights, women's pleasures, and women's daily lives was finding its complex voice at the time, in the middle 1960s.¹

When Nye dropped this egg into a plaster-filled container, she was also having children. A daughter, Tyche, would have been almost two when *Egg/Time Event* was made. The son, Bracken, would have been conceived a month or two afterwards. In her own words, she was pregnant with Bracken "out to here" when the piece was shown in her "Word Work" show at Judson Gallery, an important experimental art space in New York, in December, 1966.² In that exhibit, white things were everywhere, a virtual extension of shells within shells as infinite as the movement of light: "white walls, white burlap, bright white overhead light and inside a white vanity table with white chair to sit on... [on a nearby table] **EGG/TIME EVENTS.**"³

TIME

It is no coincidence that the clockmaker behind this organic timepiece is a childbearing woman. Even so, the block itself is adamantly inert, opaque, dusty. Its simple shape recalls the seemingly timeless, Platonic hexahedrons of classical geometry (cubes and bricks), evoking simultaneously Ancient Greek art and the stark forms of sculptural Minimalism. This white cube sat on my father's book shelf while I was growing up. At the time, I never would have seen the historic references in the work's shape.

I contemplate the block again, noticing two more, very faded stamps. Across the top and running diagonally, time's unrepentant thumb has nearly rubbed off a date. After a scattering of red flecks only "66" shows for what once read "MR 21 1966," the date the piece was made.⁴ It seems ironic that the only references to explicit time on this piece exist in near erasure. The same is true for its location in space. Along a side of the cube a red stamp reads, very faintly, "Galerie A," Harry Ruhé's legendary gallery of multiples and artists' books in Amsterdam. *Egg/Time Event* must have made the trip across the pond after my father, the artist's friend and publisher, showed it in his Something Else Gallery in New York. Being both egg and time, the work sticks and travels in space and time.

The work exists as an exemplar of time's relentless pressure. Instead of being lost in some irretrievable past, it appears in the present in all its transformed glory. French philosopher, Henri Bergson describes time's passage just this way, as a process of accumulated change: "In reality, the past is preserved by itself automatically. In its entirety, probably, it follows us at every



Figure 6. Spirit Rattle. 2013
shell with red plastic box.
Photo: Cai Xi Silver

instant.”⁵ *Egg/Time Event* encourages the viewer to think of the object in space-time, as both ever-changing and of a moment, as everywhere and everywhen.

The egg solids would have formed a viscous mass in their slow retreat, first from the shell, then the membrane, condensing in and as the white, and, finally, the yolk sack. *Egg/Time Event* could be characterized by an inward slide of the soft mass, slowly, slowly, adamantly beating a resigned retreat from the world. The mass would harden toward the bottom of the egg in the middle of the cube, the center of the natural form becoming the center of the manufactured one. Or perhaps the opposite is true. Plaster dehydrates; water would be extruded from the shell. The plaster mercilessly, softly, patiently sucking water from all sides at once, a million pores, a million microscopic straws drawing the contents toward the shell. Either way, *Egg/Time* drags and slows, marrying (through art) human, reflective time to chemical process, to decay, and to miscible materials infusing with one another.

As an artwork, the object asks for this kind of reflection. Bergson again, on art: “Naught as matter, it creates itself as form. The sprouting and flowering of this form are stretched out on an unshrinkable duration, which is one with their essence.”⁶ And so he describes the experience with artworks in terms well suited to this object; the egg as mere matter (naught) becoming art as it was formed by the artist into a cube. In so doing, the art enters the realm of the aesthetic, where unshrinkable duration (the real and imaginary processes engendered by the work) make up its aesthetic essence.

EVENT

In common parlance, events are those occurrences that affect what lies beyond or after them: a historic event that changes the world, a life altering event that shifts a life, the event-horizon of occurrences taking place in the theoretical worlds beyond the material threshold of the speed of light. The same could be said of John Cage’s 4’ 33” of so-called ‘silence’, which provides an opportunity for the audience to listen to the world as music. The world is, needless to say, unique each time, ever changing, ever in a state of flux. Fluxus artist, George Brecht, harnessed this remarkable insight in developing the Fluxus Event, which are performance instructions to observe (in the world or in language), interesting occurrences. Using the Event art form as markers, these occurrences are bracketed from life’s unremarked flow by attentiveness to them. Attentiveness makes them artworks.

Fluxus artists have always been interested in the human perception of time’s passage as it relates to the events that occur around us. In 1961, for example, Jackson Mac Low’s *Tree Movie* called for a tree to be filmed in days or months of real time (three years before Warhol’s more famous *Empire of the Empire State Building*). *Egg/Time Event* shares with *Tree Movie* a refusal of mechanical time and an interest in natural processes. Both slow things down, encouraging the viewer to pay attention to details normally missed in the rapid onslaught of life lived. Both snare time, to borrow from another Fluxus artist, Daniel Spoerri.

In the early 70s, Fluxus artists, Robert Filliou and George Brecht, invented a pocket watch, *Eastern Daylight Fluxtime*, whose regulating mechanism had been exchanged for beads, stones, a crystal, a shell or two, a hatpin and a few buttons. The work invites the observer (presumably holding it) to recognize that our experience of sequential time happens because two things can’t be in the same physical space at once. This is why time passes. There is nothing intrinsic in it. It is not separate from things or space.

Another altered clock, this time Robert Watts’ *Ten Hour Flux Clock* (1969),

replaced the twelve hour clock face with ten equidistant numerals, effectively dragging the image of represented time some seconds, then minutes, then hours, behind our lockstep habits. *Tempus Fluxit* (2013), a recent piece by Nye Ffarrabas, builds on this Flux-tradition of linking the event sensibility to time's uneven passage. The bowels of the clock have been removed, like Filliou and Brecht's clock, but the hands have been put back behind the (twelve spaced, regular) face. By retaining the hands and exchanging the letters for numbers, this 'assisted ready-made' artwork (the term refers to Marcel Duchamp), offers ample opportunities for references to mechanical time. The hands of the clock pass freely over the letter/numbers, disencumbered from their tether to a mechanism. Rather, as free arms, they dance about the clock face. Since the numbers have been replaced by letters, *Tempus Fluxit* remarks also on the emergence of Flux-poetry, of process poetry within the consciously experienced world of these artists.

Tempus Fluxit can be translated many ways. Time Flies. Time Flees. Time Flows. Any of these three is an acceptable translation of the Latin phrase, "Tempus fugit," with which the work puns. The first would certainly not apply to Fluxus work, though it is how we tend to translate the phrase in our all-too-frantic, pleasure obsessed world. "Time flies when you're having fun," goes the old adage. Another translation, "time flees" indicates that the past is in irretrievable retreat – that it is running back from the present – a phrasing that hardly applies to these durational works, in which the retreat is unharnessed by the potential repetitions of randomization (the clock) or is contained by the obdurate object, the egg held in near stasis, made available to the handler. Rather, 'time flows' comes closer to the mark for *Tempus Fluxit*. Fluxus flows, framing something interesting in time's flow.



Figure 7: *Tempus Fluxit*, assisted ready-made clock, 2013. Photo: Adam Silver

KNIFE

Nye Ffarrabas wrote a poem, “Behind the Dream,” in 2000 that speaks directly to the issue in terms that seemingly eschew such poetic readings. While artworks and inert materials have certain immortality as bearers of accreted change, the human being passes on:

How has the instant moment gone
From egg --to time--to knife

In lieu of the open-ended word ‘event’ at the end of the 1966 multiple, here we find instead the knife. The simplest reading would be to interpret the substitution as a marker of endings, of mortality or death. My description of eggs and duration, of open-ended events and fluxed time could end here, except that when I asked the artist about the seemingly simple association, she replied with a puzzle of sorts:

Nope. No connection. Egg/Time/Knife ~ A/U/M ~
beginning/duration/end ~ birth/life/death (also the Norns)⁷

AUM would bring us to the phonetic Sanskrit for the Ankara, or ohm syllable of meditation, a reading entirely consonant with the earlier work’s emphatically cumulative sense of time as duration. The Norns offers us something by way of life beyond the knife. The Norns (three Norse giantesses associated with change, both in life and on the battlefield) fix and unfix the real and mythic lives of those with whom they interact. Granted, such mysticism is rare among Fluxus artists, but not as rare as might initially be expected. Fluxus has its Cabalists, its self identified Protestants and Jews, its Buddhists, and its political idealists – at some level utopians one and all, fallen and rising angels of the creative world, where ends are, or may be, beginnings. The next stanza suggests just such a reading:

How is the fragile moment gone
By falling through to life

The knife, by this account, evokes neither death nor decay specifically, or at least not exclusively. Rather, the knife evokes a sense of emergence into life itself, phrasing that suggests a state of existential awareness. Martin Heidegger describes falling and being (Dasein) in just these terms, which seem so ideally suited to this work. The hyphens allow for hybrid words that exist in the German original, while the italics reference word couplings elsewhere in the text:

Falling into the world would then have to be re-Interpreted ontologically as Being-present-at-hand in the manner of an entity within-the-world. If, however, we keep in mind that Dasein’s Being is in the state of the Being-in-the-world...then it becomes manifest that falling, as a kind of Being of this Being-in, affords us rather the most elemental evidence for Dasein’s existentiality. In falling, nothing other than our potentiality-for-Being in the world is the issue... 8

And so I return, in a sense, to the process of time’s duration in my re-encounter with *Egg/Time Event*. This artist went from being Bici Hendricks, back to her birth name, Forbes, and finally on to being Nye Ffarrabas, the therapist, artist, and poet who lives in Brattleboro, Vermont. In these activities she is present, present in the richest sense of truly Being-in-the-world in a way reserved for the blessedly fallen among us who really are consciously in the world. She is here and there, then and now, encased in and free from her time.

Hannah B Higgins is a Professor in the School of Art and Art History at the University of Illinois, Chicago. The author of *Fluxus Experience* (University of California Press, 2002) and *The Grid Book* (MIT Press, 2008), Higgins is also the daughter of Fluxus artists Alison Knowles and Dick Higgins and the twin sister of intermedia artist, Jessica Higgins.

1. For example, and very typical of the time, EAR publisher Beth Anderson sent the following submission for this publication. It deserves to appear, but inside the protective clothing of a footnote: "Bici once explained to me that there are men who know exactly where the clitoris is and they make a point of avoiding it. That explained a lot."

2. Nye Ffarrabas (formerly Bici Hendricks), Judson Church website publication, 322. http://judson.org/images/Judson_House_68_Nye_Ffarrabas.pdf

3. *Ibid.*

4. Nye Ffarrabas in an e-mail to the author, April 1, 2014.

5. Henri Bergson, "Duration," in *Creative Evolution*, translated by Arthur Mitchell, (Mineola, NY: Dover Press, 1998), 5

6. *Ibid.*, 341.

7. Nye Ffarrabas, e-mail exchange with the author, April 1, 2014.

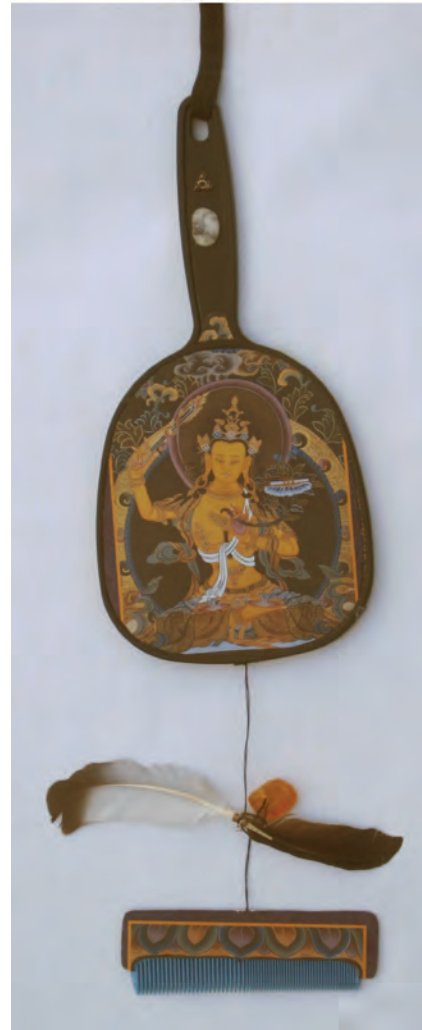
8. Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, translated by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson, (San Francisco, CA: Harper Collins, 1962), 224.

Proem

Clarinda Mac Low

Nye, as Bici, was one of my first adults. She and Geoff Hendricks, and their children Bracken and Tyche, were my second family for the first years of my life. I remember Nye's presence as solid, humorous, and curious. Art was the medium of our growth, and it was a given that all adults made art, so of course I knew Nye made art, but what that art consisted of wasn't clear to me at the time. Looking now at images of her work from the past 50 years, I see that self I knew reflected in the pieces, along with a spiky understanding of risk and pain. I think all my families from that time, have lived all this, and, as I approach my own half-century, I feel it all—curiosity, humor, risk, pain, and finally, rejuvenation.

April 10, 2014





Facing page:
Figures 8 (left/obverse) and 9 (right/reverse):
Vanity. mixed media mobile. 2009.
Photo: Cai Xi Silver

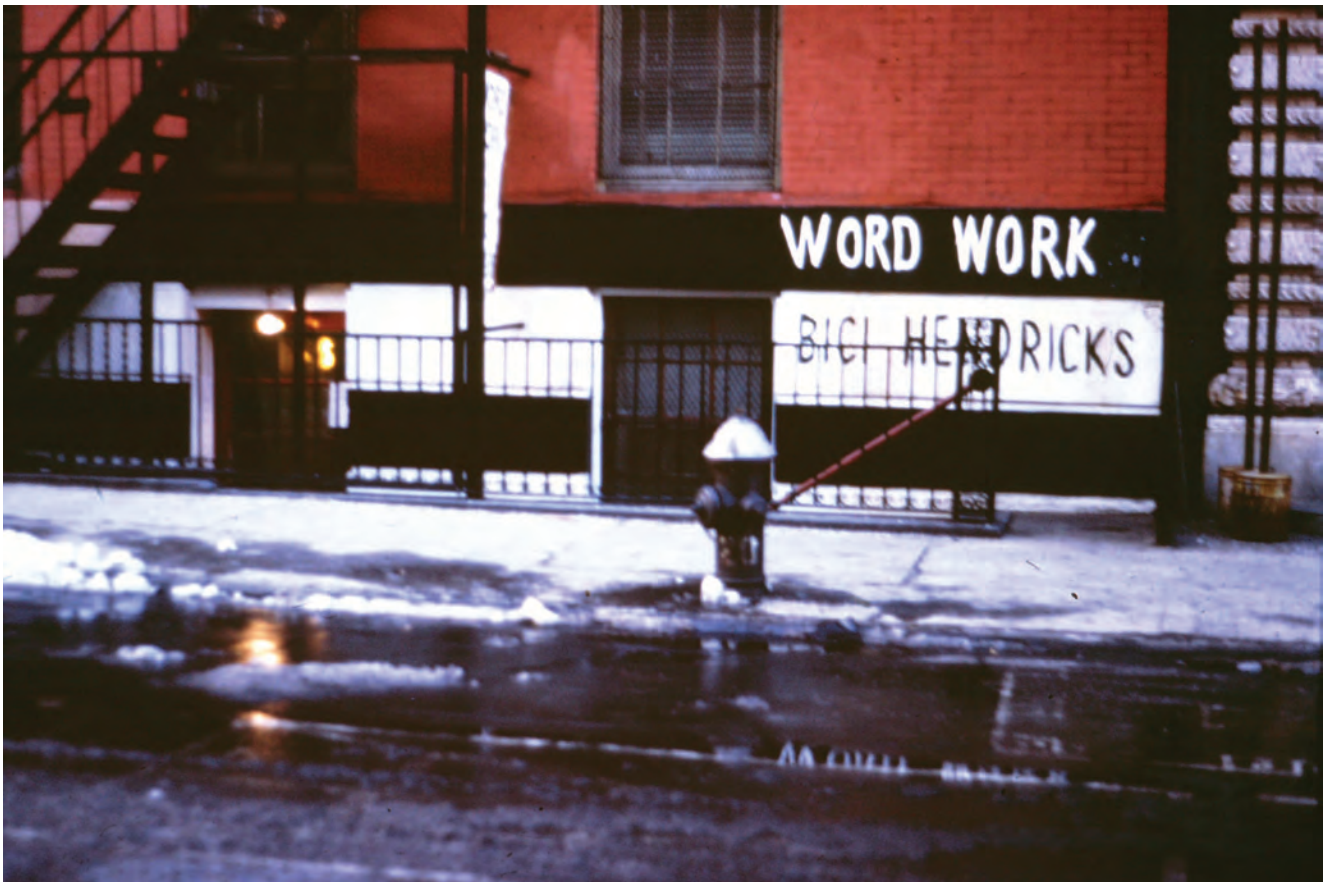
This page:
Figures 10 (above) and 11 (below):
Word Work,
street view of exhibition location, 1967.
Photo: Geoffrey Hendricks

NYE FFARRABAS

It's about time! The art world has been asleep for 50 years, dreaming of market amazements and petty talents; there has been so little effort to look back, to look up, to look down, to look forward. Perhaps it can be rationalized in some bizarre way that they didn't see at the time when it was first done, but what excuse is there to take 50 years to uncover the important body of works of Nye Ffarrabas. Careers have been made on the backs of her pioneering art works, works such as her Word Machines, her germinal neon piece *Neo/N (Über alleS)*, "*Defrost the American Flag*"; the table setting of American consumer products; *Language Box / Box Language*. The title of her show that was done at the Judson Gallery in those early, hopeful, trembling days was *WORD WORK*; it could well have been **WORDS WORK** – hers sure did. And then remember the rubbing event, where we all went out and rubbed manhole covers instead of tombstones? These are just a few memories of works that amazed me then and continue to amaze me.

Nye, on *Vanity* (facing page):
"It's about the polar ice cap and what we're doing to the environment. The Buddha is here as the opposite of vanity."

March 18, 2014
New York City



Overture

Sur Rodney (Sur)

I became familiar with the remarkable artworks of Nye Ffarrabas while working in various archives collecting materials for a project that would eventually produce the exhibition and book *Critical Mass: Happenings, Fluxus, Performance, Intermedia and Rutgers University 1958-1972*.¹ The book was edited by her former husband, the artist Geoffrey Hendricks, whom she married in 1961 and divorced on June 24, 1971 in a *Flux Divorce* staged in their Manhattan brownstone, with their friends John Lennon and Yoko Ono in attendance. The playful social, political and poetic sensibility evidenced in Nye's work are what make it a standout and have me recall her *Universal Laundry/Prayer Flag* event for Charlotte Moorman's Annual New York Avant-Garde Festival in 1966; instigating the idea of creating stilts for competitors participating in George Maciunas' *Flux Sports*² in the Old Gym at Douglass College in 1970; and her sculpture *Neo/N (Über alleS)* presented at Judson Church that same year, are a few noteworthy examples. Along with her events and sculptures, the many wondrous small editions produced intermittently with her Black Thumb Press and distributed through the mail locate her at the nexus of the avant-garde of the period that is being actively historicized today.

Sur Rodney (Sur), archivist

1. Geoffrey Hendricks, *Critical Mass: Happenings, Fluxus, Performance, Intermedia, and Rutgers University, 1958-1972*, New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press: 2003).

2. Stilt Soccer, for instance. - Nye.



Figure 12 *Universal Laundry*. 1966. paint on cotton diaper. Photo: Cai Xi Silver



Figure 13: *Neo/N (Über alleS)*, neon, 1967. Photo: Geoffrey Hendricks

Nye on Neo/N (Über alleS):



Figure 14: *Neo/N (Über alleS)* re-imagined without the blue, just the yellow, graphics from slide, 2014. Design: Adam Silver.

As often seems to happen with me, I will write something down, and on looking it over, some association will form in my mind - unexpected, surprising, seemingly at odds with what I had intended to say, yet not unrelated or irrelevant when considered carefully. I was jotting down the German phrase *über alles* (above everything else) - the words used in the German national anthem under Hitler. What struck me was the letters U and S, and then the question about us in the U.S. (United States) - what is our national zeitgeist and foreign policy of being 'over' 'all,' involved everywhere. perceived by other countries. And so, a flashing neon sign with a cross-cultural message, first flashing U S and then filling in the umlaut and the remaining letters. .

My Mother's Art-Life-Play-Work

Tyche Hendricks

O
RAN
GEJU
ICE
TAS
TESD
IFFE
REN
TINT
ALLG
LAS
SE
S

The stenciled banner hung in our stairwell in Cambridge in the 1970s. Each day when I started down the stairs and out the door to middle school, it offered me the sound of syllables, shaken loose from words, and challenged me to puzzle over what makes meaning.

Earlier, in Manhattan in the late 1960s and early '70s, my mother took my little brother and me on expeditions to make rubbings of manhole covers. Carrying large sheets of paper and crayons, we would hover (on the sidewalk? out in the street?) as she darted into an intersection when the traffic light was in her favor, crouched over an ornate, cast-iron manhole cover, and hastily rubbed its impression onto the paper in color.

What was art? Where was art? It could be found -- on the street, beneath the traffic -- if you were attuned to it.

Mum also stopped with us to pick shaggy manes and inky caps (*Coprinus comatus* and *Coprinus atramentarius*; the Latin names as important as the evocative common names) growing on the grass lawns around the I.L.G.W.U. housing project apartment towers in Chelsea. Usually mushrooming was something we did in the country, not the city. Was this art too?

I later learned she had written the following instructions for a performance: "Go for a mushroom walk (a) in the Metropolitan Museum, (b) on the Staten Island Ferry."

Instructions for another piece went more or less like this: "On the first day of spring, give a bouquet of daffodils to a librarian." I performed it with Mum at the Jefferson Market Library in Greenwich Village. Did it feel like we were making art? It just felt like what we did.

In our home, the membrane separating art and ordinary life was permeable. My



Figure 15: *Orange Juice*. colored pencil on paper, 1964. Photo: Cai Xi Silver

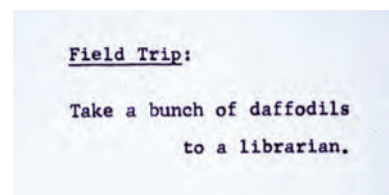


Figure 16: *Field Trip*. 1966-67. typed instruction as slide projected onto wall, Judson Gallery, NY. Photo: Geoffrey Hendricks



Figures 17 (above) and 18 (below): *Pavilion of Litter*, performance/installation, 1967. Photo: Geoffrey Hendricks

mother (then Bici, now Nye) crossed it regularly, sharing the sense that, as Dick Higgins put it in his 1979 essay, *A Child's History of Fluxus*, "The sloshing of my foot in my wet boot sounds more beautiful than fancy organ music."¹

Her sensibility includes the everyday and the serendipitous: tarot cards picked up off the street, stanzas arranged by throwing the I Ching. Taoism, Buddhism, as well as Fluxus, play a part.

The quotidian, of course, includes the domestic. And my mother's art work often drew attention to "women's" work. At the 1969 Avant Garde Festival on Ward's Island, New York, she spent her days picking up other people's trash for her *Pavilion of Litter*. At our farm in Nova Scotia, I watched her make another piece that included hanging laundry on the line (fittingly, it was our family's laundry, which needed washing and drying, not laundry for art's sake alone).

Some of my mother's work expresses outrage. Her *Defrost the American Flag*, *Chair Piece*, and *Neo/N* (Über alles), respond to the brutality and overreach of state power.

But they do so with the whimsical, poetic sense embodied in that stenciled banner of syllables that hung above the stairs. They skewer authority with puns and turn symbols on their head. And last week when we had friends over for dinner, *Chair Piece* became chairs again, the source of an extra seat that I could pull up to the table.

Art. Life. Work. Play.

2014



1. Dick Higgins, "Child's History of Fluxus," *Horizons: The Poetics and Theory of the Intermedia*. Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press: 1984. <http://www.artnotart.com/fluxus/dhiggins-childshistory.html> (1979). In 1963, Nye wrote: "A snowplow with a broken chain made the most gorgeous music that I heard in the city."

Language Boxing

Bracken Hendricks

Beatrice Forbes: Shipping and receiving her words, with packing tape and marking pens and mailing labels. Nye Ffarrabas: Pugilist. Contender. Champion. My mother is a woman of contradictions and of change, crafting word pairs and double meanings. She embraces the ambiguity of her transient identities, the imperative and inadequacy of all definition. Her truth is a squirming earthworm – hermaphroditic and double headed – with which she baits a hook and fishes for knowledge, glad for the sunny day, the rich soil, the sky and the stream. Her masterworks are alchemical, sublimating form—into action—into meaning—into vanishing. My mother often breathes: both inhaling and exhaling. She is farsighted, but wears reading glasses on a chain around her neck. She laughs suddenly and loudly. Nye is a great writer because she is a visual artist. She is an artist because she loves the sounds of words. My mother is a woman of letters. And also strings of letters, that frequently form words, but equally may drift across the page as pictures and sounds; as clues, or threats, or promises. My mother is patient. My mother has wrinkles at the corners of her eyes from laughter and from grieving. My mother is alive. These are the things you need to know about her artwork.

“Defrost the American Flag” was her protest of a long-ago war. People were bleeding on dusty roads somewhere far away. Her response – a woman in her kitchen – was to freeze the flag into a block of ice and watch it thaw. The melting of a dream? The release of a promise? Domestic tears? Patriotism? She made another flag into a rocking chair, and set it in our living room, to contemplate, to sit on, and ignore. Pregnant with my sister she read across the columns of the newspaper, joining topics,

Nye discusses
“Defrost the American Flag”:

This flag, frozen in water in a cake pan, and displayed upon a bed of clean pebbles – in a clear plastic tray to contain the melt water – was the first of a number of expressions of dismay at what our country was doing in Viet Nam. I am making this description very clear so that there will be no distortions, this time, as there were half a century ago in the press, so hungry for sensationalism and scandal that they were ready to twist anything they encountered, to that end.

On the basis of completely fabricated “reporting,” by a so-called art critic (who admitted, when confronted, that he had never even seen the work he fraudulently described) – first in *Newsweek*, and then in *Art In America*, I was denounced and my work excoriated as the “desecration of all desecrations of the American flag,” by the Women’s Auxiliary of a “patriotic” group in Culver City California).

Please note that, had I not already created this piece so many years ago, I would be creating it now, for the same reasons and in the same anguish of spirit concerning our activities at home and abroad. And, for the record, it is not I, but the government of our country, who is heaping shame upon our flag – and the republic for which it stands.



Figure 19: “Defrost the American Flag”, performance/installation with flag, ice and pan. 1966-67. Reenacted 2014. Dimensions variable. Photo: Adam Silver



Figure 20: *Rx: Stress Formula*.
Photo: Cai Xi Silver
See figure 21.

finding chance significance and unintended meaning. These became “News Capsules”, which she trimmed into confetti strands, and carefully folded inside gelatin pills until she filled an Rx bottle. Her life’s love is poetry. This written work, whether pantoum or blank verse, is carefully assembled: filled with well-chosen words fitting comfortably in your palm like a quality tool, a well-weighted hammer with a powerful swing. Many of her poems are also lozenges. You will find they feel good on your tongue, and can soothe an inflammation. In “Punctuation Poems” her words simply deliquesce, and melt away like ice (or identity), until all we are left with are the pauses, the stops and starts, joining and breaking the silence of the page. Nye’s “Black Thumb Press” was not an artwork or a poem at all, but rather a laboratory for tinkering and experimentation with the elements of style and meaning, beauty and communication. Exalting the greasy thumbprint of the mechanic who repairs the press, and the technician who inks the plate, equally alongside the author who crafted the verse. The literal press that birthed the poem, remembered on the page, fingerprints pressed indelibly into the volume. Creator, fabricator, distributor, and reader all joined in conversation. This is what you will find within this retrospective.

The art of Nye Ffarrabas is both ephemeral and enduring. At its best, her genius is in dreaming, and her craft in cutting to the bone. This work is important and ambiguous. Let it linger in the back of your mind.

April 6th, 2014

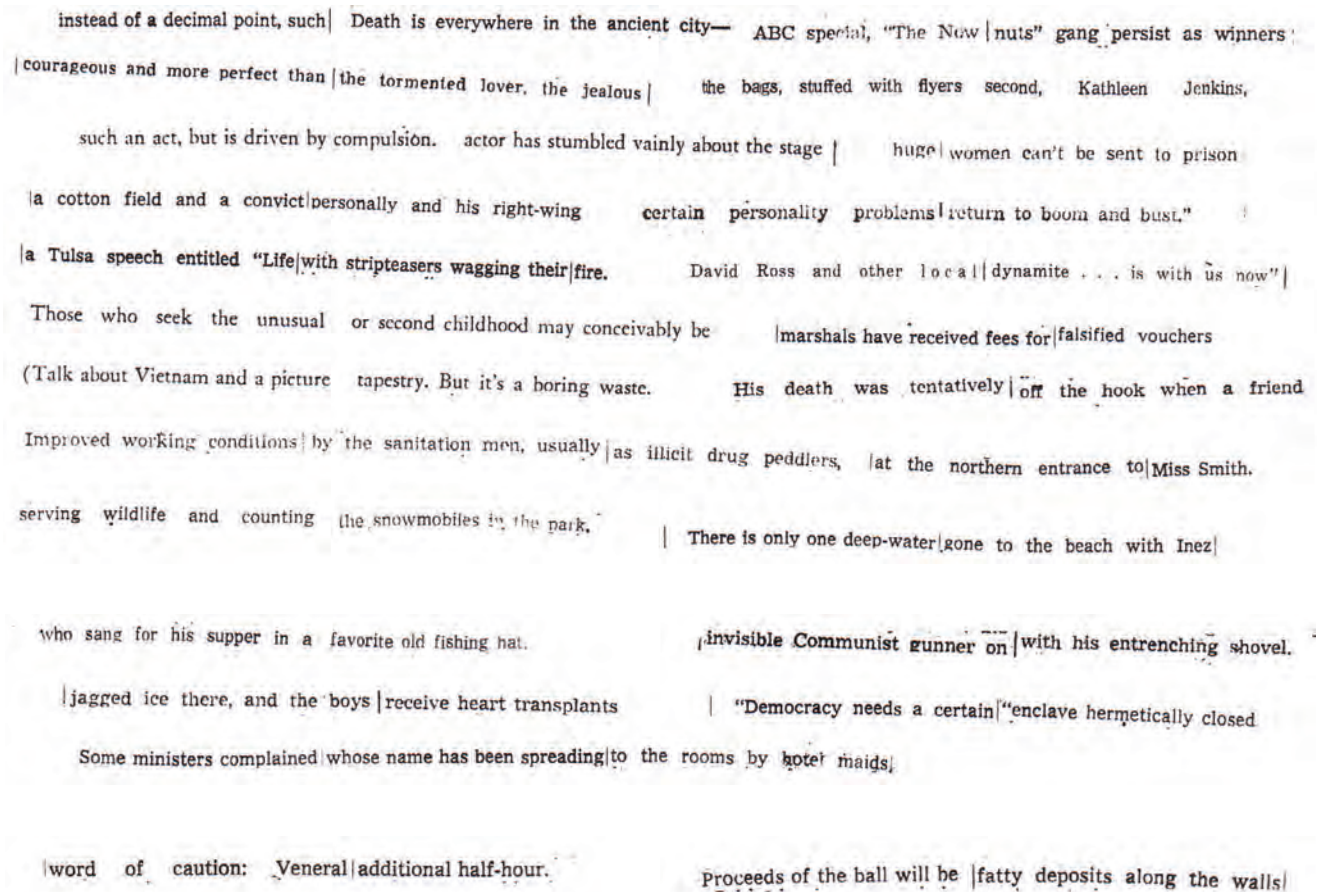


Figure 21: sections from *Reading Across The Lines*. newspaper, collage. 1964-67. Dimensions variable. Photo: Adam Silver

Dismiss me if you dare

Kendra Mackenzie

Writing for Nye...3/23/14

“Dismiss me if you dare”—a final admonition from a Nye Ffarrabas poem on turning sixty, curmudgeonly so.....

Unrelentingly, daily, Nye takes up her task as practitioner of stealthy inversions, setting out for us tables of the commonplace, the discarded—morsels that, when placed askew, invite us to partake, digest, and be changed by our experience. Whether in word or object, elisions proliferate and untether ... ruptures occur. That which binds may unbind and be bound again in a further configuration. In the spaces that open, she offers what she sees, from the heart. Deeply abiding in parts of life murmuring below surfaces, she may rouse her smoldering humor to a raucous laughter, salting the interchange, shifting our glance—no dust here!

Nye’s poems and objects voice brevity and wry wit, a passion for social justice, and a fierce challenge to meet her gaze as she enlivens the everyday and familiar to become carriers of more insistent questions. In often playful and intimate work, we witness her grit, her endurance, and delight in the wicked turns of phrase, grounded deep in Yankee sensibility and generosity of spirit. Her gift given is one of extending to us her company as we are left with her silence and grace, often in a place of uncertainty and ultimate contradiction.

Kendra Mackenzie, friend of almost fifty years

Label reads: “A Stress Formula Publication. Directions: One capsule every four hours, for laughs - refills as needed. Black Thumb Kharmaceuticals. Nye Ffarrabas - 1976.” Installation reenacted, 2014, with photograph of new bottle and label. Original 1970-78 pill bottle and label: The Gilbert and Lila Silverman Fluxus Collection Gift, the Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY., U.S.A.

Neo/N at The Currier

Sue Brearey

I had the great pleasure of working with Nye Ffarrabas for the opening exhibition of the Michael S. Currier Center in April of 2004. In curating the 78-person alumni show, I was so pleased to discover that Nye had not only been a Putney student but also a Fluxus artist. Her work, *Neo/N (Über alleS)*, was, at that time, stored in a basement storage closet at Judson Church in New York City. Through many a phone call and conversation, I was able to pick up the box and bring it to Putney. It was installed, plugged in and literally lit up the show with its fantastic neon and political splendor. Nye’s contribution to the Fluxus movement was profound and her work continues to inspire to this day. It was thrilling to have *Neo/N* as part of the show, enjoyed by all at Putney during the course of the exhibit. Nye continues to make thought provoking, fun and original work and is a delightful human being. I have enjoyed her friendship as much as I’ve enjoyed her work and feel so lucky to know her!

Susan Brearey

The Putney School

April 10, 2014



Figure 22: *Rx: Stress Formula*. pill bottle, label, gelatin capsules, messages on paper from *Reading Across Columns*. 2014. Dimensions variable. Installation by the artist. Photo: Adam Silver

Prologue

Geoffrey Hendricks



Figure 23: *Language Box* (box with introduction booklet, 329 printed cards, 4 blank cards), 1966. Photo: Cai Xi Silver. See also, page 26 for people's impressions of *Language Box* in 1966.

Nye is a wordsmith, an alchemist with words. She created *Word Works* [moving texts in a black box], and word pairs that became *Language Box* [bonsai, minimalist poetry]. And we kept a collaborative journal, *The Friday Book of White Noise*. For a decade we traveled through life together. Two children. Three grandchildren. Shared memories. A lot bonds us. In 1964 we started the Black Thumb Press and sent out small mailings. Nye planned meals of single colors, turning meals into art. By the mid 60's we were part of Fluxus, and also active participants in Charlotte Moorman's Avant Garde Festivals. In 1967 at the New York Mycological Society Banquet¹ Nye sat next to Marcel Duchamp. In 1970 we went to Cologne together for the "Happening and Fluxus" exhibition at the Kunstverein, where she had *Dinner Service* with hubcap plates on an American flag, and her powerful piece *Neo/N [Über alles]* flashing on the wall behind. By the late '60's, our passion for social engagement had us taking our children on our shoulders to Gay Rights marches and Anti-War demonstrations. In 1971 to celebrate our 10th wedding anniversary we had a Flux Divorce. George Maciunas helped with ideas and John Lennon and Yoko Ono were guests, a special celebratory event.

NYC, April, 2014.

1. For more on this event, see next page, p. 26.

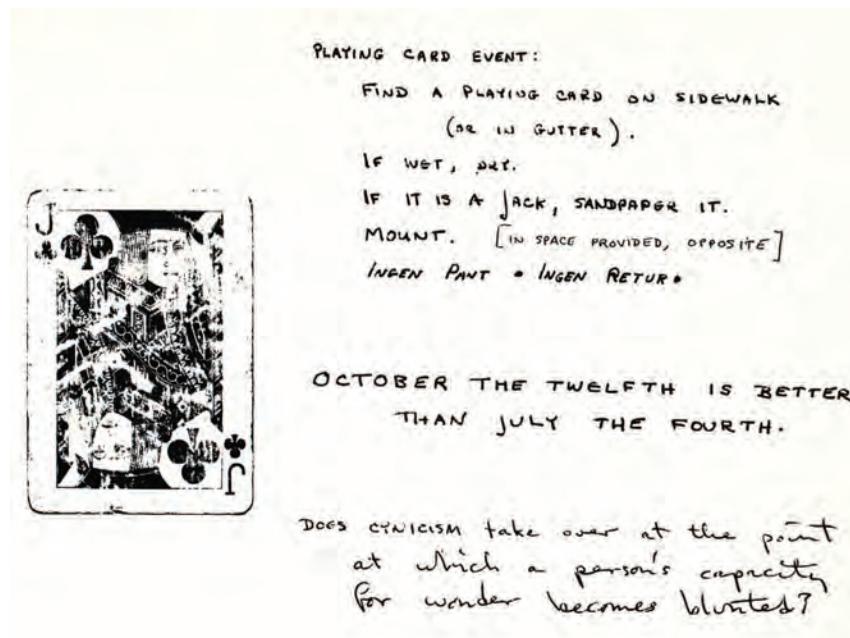


Figure 24: a page by Bici from *The Friday Book of White Noise*. 1964. Used by permission. Previously included in John Cage's *Notations* (New York: Something Else Press, 1969), 131.

Bici's collection of promotional materials for *Language Box*, 1966:

Figure 25. photocopy of typed poster. Image of *Language Box* is on previous page, p. 25.

About LANGUAGE BOX by Bici Hendricks
Black Thumb Press 900 West End Avenue NYC NY 10025;

" To a few the idea of having to invent one's own game will be worst of all. With no self-starter, no shock-absorbers, and no brakes, you may have to get out and push LANGUAGE BOX -- or it may run away with you. An innovation of Bici Hendricks and her Black Thumb Press (whose logo is her own inky thumb print), LANGUAGE BOX is a collection of 334 cards -- about the size businessmen use -- with a word printed on each side."

Howard Smith
Village Voice

" Fascination for openminded word collectors. LANGUAGE BOX can serve as a game... Any number can play... You learn to write a poem, to use words the chance way, discover their secret combinations... Become a word composer."

Lil Picard
East Village Other

" The idea is to isolate the word or object in such a way as to make it assume new symbolic dimensions... Objects and words ...transcend their usual meaning and render one's encounter with them an experience rooted in the surprising, the unexpected."

John Gruen
World Journal Tribune

" Delightful hijinks."

John Perreault
Village Voice

" LANGUAGE BOX points to one way out of the language box. It's the LSD of poetry. Congratulations on your imagination and your craftsmanship."

Ronald Gross

" LANGUAGE BOX is fun... Play is a very creative activity... I've promised myself that after all the captains and the kings depart I'm going to relax and fool around with those provocative, evocative little cards!"

Beatrice Page

" Playing around is the most important goal of the arts today. For no reason. For non sense. Bici Hendricks gives you a neat, cheap little word game LANGUAGE BOX. With it the pros ought to be able to give a damn live course in English for a change."

Allan Kaprow

Mycological Association Banquet

The front and back of a coupon for baby food re-envisioned as an art piece, *New Fruit Flavors For Baby*, signed and passed around to others at the Mycological Association's annual banquet in New York, December 12, 1967. "My neighbor, on my left, was Marcel Duchamp. Dick Higgins and Alison Knowles were seated across from us, and on my right was the charming and witty actress and dear friend, Florence Tarlow - veteran of dozens of theatrical productions at Judson. Conversation flowed this way and that, M. Duchamp chiming in with many engaging observations about art and life in general, and the whole affair was genial and pleasant. At one point, I found myself rummaging in a small purse for something to write on, so we could all commemorate this occasion with our names. What I came up with was a coupon for some new flavor of baby food: New Fruit Flavors for Baby. I passed this around to the other four in my immediate vicinity, and all wrote their names, except Florence who filled in all the loops in the letters on the coupon, and added, 'I would love Blueberry Buckle!'"

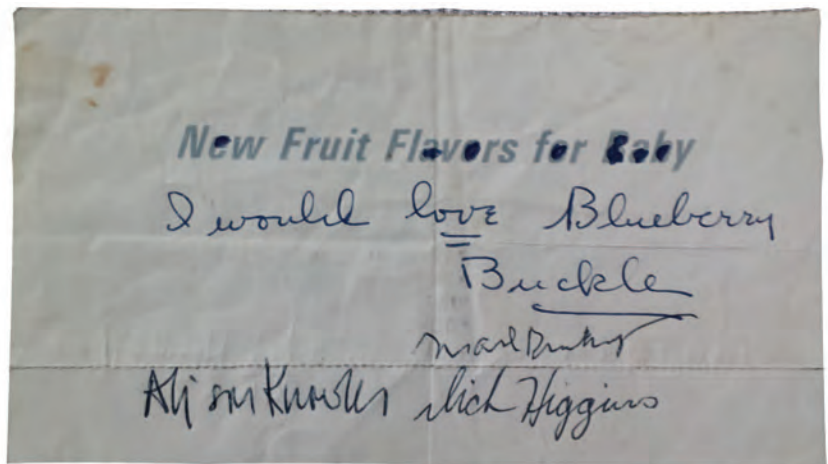
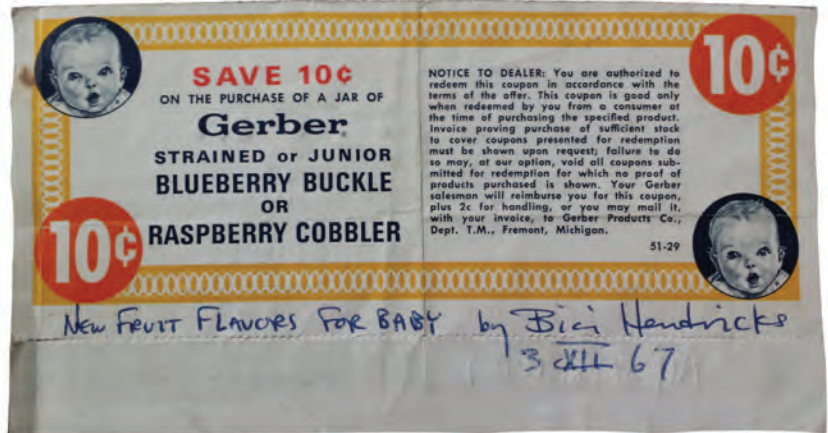


Figure 26: *New Fruit Flavors for Baby*. (coupon, front and back with artists' signatures, comment and doodles. December 3, 1967, at the Mycological Association Banquet. Photo: Adam Silver.

A Virtual Reunion

From: [Mieko Shiomi](#)
To: 'Nye Ffarrabas'
Sent: Saturday, March 29, 2014 9:48 PM
Subject: RE: inv to contrib a few wrds

Dear Bici,(Nye),

Congratulations !
I would like to contribute these words.

[Feel Wind.](#)

From: [Carolee Schneemann](#)
To: Nye Ffarrabas
Sent: Tuesday, April 01, 2014 1:38 PM
Subject: Re: inv to contrib a few wrds

Very dear Nye,

I wish you all success
and joyful reception.

With love and fond best wishes,

Carolee

From: Anne Tardos
To: 'Nye Ffarrabas'
Sent: Thursday, April 03, 2014 10:04 AM
Subject: RE: inv to contrib a few wrds

Dear Nye,

Congratulations on the book!
Here are nine words for you:
"Daring, inventive, profound,
hugely attractive, charming,
and thoughtful Nye."

Very much love,

Anne

From: [Iris Lezak](#)
To: Nye Ffarrabas
Date: Mon, Mar 31, 2014

a potent memory for your book:
standing on a ladder to paint your ceiling
i spilled a whole can of red paint.

dear Nye

DREAM

love yoko

spring 2014

Acknowledgments

Nye Ffarrabas

'Had we but world enough and time'
The fragments of a scattered mind
Might coalesce and make some sense
If not adequate recompense.

Where to begin? It would have to be with Jon Hendricks who offered me my first solo show at Judson Gallery, in NYC, 'way back in the fall of 1966, and who has remained a stalwart fan and friend for all these years, seeing my work was included in the Silverman Collection, now in the Museum of Modern Art, in New York - a consummation never even imagined by me!

After that first show, one thing leading to another, many exhibitions and group participations began to happen in my life. I have tried, elsewhere, to list the many friends who meant so much and helped in such a lot of ways, but who are no longer here to receive their accolades. For those who remain - friends old and new - whose presence buoyed me up in heavy seas, whose networking helped extend my reach, and who pitched in with hours of assistance, sober reflection, welcome laughter, favors large and small, and life-giving encouragement - thank you from the bottom of my heart!

My long-time friend Gillian Winner mentioned my affiliation with Fluxus to her daughter, Ros, an artist in New York, and Ros, aware of a show being prepared at the Hood Museum, Dartmouth, on the theme of Fluxus, made the connection that landed me in the show. And from there, a delightful acquaintanceship with Jackie Baas, the show's curator.

One other such occurrence deserves mention: the opening of Michael S. Currier Center for the Arts, at the Putney School, in Vermont. Somehow, news of my doings in the art world had eluded them. It was the inaugural show for the magnificent new art building, and was for alumni/ae artists. Sur Rodney (Sur) got wind of this, and he and Geoff Hendricks spoke up for me - and presto! - I was in the show, graciously received by the gallery director, Sue Brearey.

Networking definitely has some connection with magic! The next thing was a phone call from Cai Xi Silver, an artist in Brattleboro whom I knew slightly. She had seen my piece illustrated in the Hood show catalog. Was I a Fluxus artist? Yes! Could she interview me for a paper she was writing on Fluxus for her MFA? Of course! And so another friendship bloomed, with her and her husband Adam; and out of this unfolds the show at hand.

Pulling together a retrospective show of 50 years of work is no mean undertaking! But Cai and Adam, co-conspirators in this endeavor, have been over-the-top, all the way, with sound suggestions, enormous good humor, and amazing workarounds for knotty problems as these inevitably arose. One could not ask for better folks to work with.

So many dear, good people have been available when needed: Tyche and Bracken Hendricks, my grown - and very talented - children; Kendra MacKenzie; Devin Starlanyl; Patrick Donnelly and Bronwyn Sims; Geoff and Sur; Geoff's sister, Hildamarie - a willing ear and durable

friend. My sister Hilly Greene whom I see all-too-seldom, but love very much, and nieces and nephews who give me hope that this woeful world may yet be turned around. And my beautiful grandkids, who are starting to show their mettle, make me proud.

Those who are my teachers, whether they know it or not (including my cat, Teacher), and especially poets Martha Ramsey, Nan Lee Heminway, Verandah Porche, and Megan Buchanan - My health team - My friends around the corner at St. M's - Geshe-la and Jampa Tenzin, Richard and El, and all the other Dharma teachers hereabouts - The Brattleboro TimeTrade cohort - Joey Carroll who tinkered with my Chairs and dances with swords - My downstairs neighbor Helen, and Rick across the hall, who always seem to do a good turn just when it counts ... And all the people who responded with the astonishing flood of kind remarks and good wishes for the show. I am blessed beyond my wildest dreams, and grateful to you all!

I wish to express my thanks to Judson Church for permission to quote extensively from my article in *Remembering Judson House*; to Hansjörg Mayer, for permission to use passages from my article in *Mr. Fluxus*; to Something Else Press for permission to quote from my contributions to *Fantastic Architecture* and John Cage's *Notations*, and to Small Pond Press for permission to reprint my poems from the two Write Action anthologies.

1. Remembering Andrew Marvell.

Fallen Comrades

Nye Ffarrabas

To fallen comrades, teachers and leaders:

Léonie Adams	Arakawa	Allan Kaprow
Louise Bourgeois	George Brecht	Addi Kópke
Jean Brown	Brian Buczak	Roy Lichtenstein
John Cage	Sari Dienes	Jackson Mac Low
Joseph Campbell	Robert Filiou	Peter Moore
Ric Campman	Madeline Gins	Nam June Paik
Al Carmines	Al Hansen	Lil Picard
Jane Cooper	Phil Harmonic	Frank Pileggi
Marcel Duchamp	Dick Higgins	Hala Pietkiewicz
Robert Fitzgerald	Hui Ka Kwong	Ely Raman
Emily Harvey	Ray Johnson	Florence Tarlow
Werner Heider	Jill Johnston	Roland Turner
John Lennon	Joe Jones	Bob Watts
Agnes Swift		Emmett Williams
Janet vanSaun Pope		Fumio Yoshimura

and especially to the three M's:

George Maciunas, Howard Moody, Charlotte Moorman
movers, and shakers, and candlestick makers

Before The Fact

Nye Ffarrabas

When people ask me, “And what sort of art work do *you* do?” What to tell them? Do I say that I’m a Fluxus artist? (Well, *am* I?) Some days yes, and some days no, I guess.

I’ve been making stuff for a long time, and writing wa-a-ay longer than that. I write ‘regular’ poems, and quite irregular poems, funny ones and sad ones, love poems and bitchy poems, sudden haikulike snapshots, refrigerator magnet poems, International Signal Code poems, and a few longer ones to chew on. And prose pieces on far-ranging subjects – art and life, gender, death, small creatures, the planet in crisis, and the multifarious aspects and activities of what e.e. cummings called “this busy monster man unkind.” Above all, I write, create artifacts, perform, obsess – and fuss endlessly, to the despair of my friends – about meaning. And, if possible, I blur distinctions among all of these things, and cover my tracks when I can. . . . So. Am I an ‘artist’? Or a ‘writer’? (Or *what?*) The answer is, “Definitely.”

More to the point, I work with what I find around me, either objects or words, and I go from there. It’s a way of engaging with the world in an experimental, questing manner, much as a baby puts everything in her mouth to find out what it is. The results can be – well, just about anything (something old, something new).

A good many of my larger pieces have a strong socially-conscious focus: *Neo/N*, *Dinner Service*, *Chair Piece*, and others, which have been exhibited here and abroad. Some of the texts that run in my Word Work boxes are political, too, such as “**PEACE ON EARTH . . . GOODWILL TO MEN . . . NAPALM VILLAGES FOR FUN AND PROFIT . . .**” (1966), and a contemporary companion piece about drones (2014). Others are contemplative: “**OIL THE HAIR ON A BABY’S HEAD AND COMB IT LIKE A JAPANESE SAND GARDEN . . .**” or philosophical: “**ME-MENTO MORI . . . INGEN PANT – INGEN RETUR . . .**” (no deposit – no return, from a Norwegian beer bottle). There are holiday cards with anti-war themes, poems about AIDS, and a flight of BurmaShave-style roadside jingles for a stalwart, 93-year-old woman (“Granny D”) who, running for U.S. Senate against the reigning Republican incumbent, got 34% of the vote. I contributed those jingles to her campaign, and I honor her forever in my heart.

Then there are ‘calligraphies’ that hang on the wall; again, with a spectrum of sensibilities and moods – from fanciful to elegaic to irreverently ironic to polemical – and some holiday cards and other mail art pieces, and buttons and bumperstickers that I created. Ironic valentines. And found objects in various states of transformation, or at least redefinition.

Are all these Fluxworks? Oh, please! I've never decided, and, frankly, I don't feel the need to. Hmm; as Fluxmaster Emmett Williams said, "If you can define it – it isn't." (*Bravo!*)

I have been playing in and out of all of these realities for a long time. In my writing, too. But, hey! – if the work works, what else needs to be said about it?

One thing I certainly share with Fluxus philosophically, however, is a pervasive and often humorous refusal to observe such niceties as mindless materialism, self-congratulatory religious zeal, knee-jerk patriotism, and 'pretty' (i.e.: undisturbing, or commercialized) art, in general. But my interest in subject matter ranges far beyond such things, and the materials I use are often taken from stuff that other people have jettisoned: left-overs, broken objects, typos, and such. Sometimes these things have been reworked, other times the simple act of finding them and giving them a name, and a place to be, is it.

I revere many spiritual practices, concepts, and images, and I hold the cosmos, in general, deeply in awe. But sometimes we just need a tweak to find the freshness – or irony – or truth – or relevance in something. Oh . . . but if a piece – written or seen – makes you chuckle, or laugh outright, does that mean it isn't 'serious' or 'thoughtful' or 'worthwhile'? Not at all! It's just another way of coming at whatever subject matter you are confronting (. . . so lighten up, already!). Layers upon layers, levels beneath levels, meanings behind meanings, that pop out at you from behind a tree or wake you in the night! Let's drag our stale, consumeristic culture out on the lawn and sort it for a yard sale: yeah! (Hey, look! Here's a hat for Granny D! – Oh? It isn't 'really' hers? No matter, it'll stand as a reminder of her noble, questing spirit and her great, infectious grin, and the many thousand miles she walked for a good cause!)

Transmutation of objects into unintended purposes . . . that's magic!

Furthermore, when you start seeing things in a new way, nothing is exempt, and the playfulness that emanates from this brings new insights, fresh interconnections, and some unsuspected depths. At the same time, speaking from my own perspective, everything is in some way sacred. And special. And weird. And heartbreaking. And hilarious. And breathtaking. And touching. . . . Or something. And, in the presence of insatiable curiosity and plentiful goodwill, anything can be seen anew, in another light, showing us ourselves, also, in new ways.

This makes life interesting and suggests new names, faces, addresses, and uses for old thingamabobs and threadbare feelings and ideas. And so it goes. (Ummm: What does she mean by "it"?)

Thank you for listening.

2014

Figure 28. *A Hat for Granny D*. Assemblage. 2014.
Photo: Cai Xi Silver.



Housecleaning

I want to clean my house
Scrub the floors bare and gleaming
Push back the walls
Carry out trash by the barrel
Throw open windows
Strip down for living

Bullying words till they mind me
I would bite with bare teeth
A clean cadence
Scour nouns
Straiten verbs
Spare none

Who will help me do this
Who teach, who guide me
Jack up my weariness
No one? Only the wind
Of loneliness? Only ungentle fear
Of eventual darkness?

1956

After thought

Time tease phantoms
Obliterates touch ~
Nature abhors nothing
Discredits much.

1958

Go

When you go down as far as you can with her
And return with grief in your hands
You will find her not where you left her
But in warm winds

1961

The Ahab

Never did Pride and Humility
War so in a human breast
And Pride took a beating
(But Pride came off best)

The face that bore that conflict
Masklike, was scarred
With malignancy that makes
Sore places hard

And when he saw his image
Shattered glass and all
But could not reach the fiend
Beyond the wall

He hunted outward Evil
With a rage-contorted hand
And invoked the (minor) elements
Sea and Land

Never did a hunter
Brave a hate so cold
With a child's understanding
And a face so old

1956

Dual

When a butterfly rose above the trees
Wings in gold red fire displayed
A child running stopped
Looking up cried
Hey let me see you wait let me

And it could not wait or rest
Wavering in broad pattern flight
Drawn by the sun
Drinking the light
Till by dance the whole day was crossed

1958

October Revolution

How shall this day, distinct, be in a year's time?
Shall I remember with kaddish and sutra
Longing, thanksgiving, or a meditation?
Churned guts, systolic flutter, rapid breathing I feel now
A cyclone in my head? Weak knees?
Or the long thread of understanding and tried wings

The seared wax held - a few feathers lost
But the wings held. Wax held. I knew then
The drops were not lost wax but grease of fear -
A moment slender as noon
When I quit that gripped toe hold on the rock and plunged
Out on new wings. Sinking feeling of lost altitude
And then the grip on air - bunching under, bulging
Out from under, bursting away
Beating, lifting off, upward and free!

That moment, hate, pity, and terror dissolved in joy
Slid away on a slick of gleeful wind.
That moment, so like the others
Before and after I had no sense of moment
Only, all at once I caught myself flying
And that was it -

Not volition, not count three and hold your breath
Just ~ look, Godde, no hands! ~ and the thought catching up with you after
And that was when suddenly weak knees and the rest of it . . .
Because it was done.

1962

I remember puzzling about how to configure the horse-like creature to make it as large as possible and still fit into the dimensions of the folded paper. I had already cut the piece when I thought of putting a mushroom in the gap under the belly. My teachers, Miss Lincoln and Miss Torrey included the picture in a book they later published about an on-going project of theirs, which they called The Saint Nicholas Workshop. My memories of these wonderful ladies are of imaginative fosterage of the creative spark of children, especially ones who labored under physical, familial, or developmental difficulties. Kay and Patty were, along with Agnes Swift (librarian), among the most felicitous and shining examples of a benign and loving universe in my young life.



Figure 29. Unicorns and Mushrooms, 1938. paper cut-out. Photographer unknown.

Bici Interviews Bob Watts

Dec. 14, 1962

Transcribed by Adam Silver from recordings
used by permission of Nye Ffarrabas and The Roy Lichtenstein Foundation

BICI FORBES HENDRICKS: I am trying to get at your particular feeling about humor, wit. Or perversity, grotesqueness, whatever it may be.

BOB WATTS: I feel that everything can fit in, somehow, to art. Any quality.

Bici: What's the stipulation, though? If what? I mean, there must be an if.

Bob: That it somehow becomes significant. Or significantly meaningful. Or intimately meaningful. ... Did I misunderstand you?

Bici: Art, as I understand it, has something to do with the human process, some place. Aside from the production of a thing, which is essentially commercial, maybe. In other words, if it's a found object, it has to have been found by the artist; if it's a bought object, it has to have been bought by the artist, and presumably placed in some way. And you can go on from there. The artist has to do something to it to make it be art.

Bob: Yeah. I don't disagree. The artist *always* does something.

Bici: Yeah. But you were saying it has to become significant. ... And I'm saying it has to be significant in the presence of the artist having done something.

Bob: We mean the same thing, I guess.

Bici: Because ... a hurricane could be significant, but it wouldn't be art. ... Unless you had someone looking at it and saying, "Man, that's art."

Bob: Or unless an artist chose to somehow present the idea of the hurricane as a new form - which is one of things that Brecht and I tried to do with our Looney Van. Which is one of the things that I'm interested in at the moment, is: how does one now - today - go about doing something with natural things that have always been so important, without tainting them, without making a sculpture from them. How does one restate this today? And this is why I'm using the event form, today. And doing it by mail, because it's another way of doing it without writing poetry.

Bici: [Pause] ... I'm not entirely certain you're *not* writing poetry.

Bob: Well, neither am I.

Bici: Not making poetry. I mean, you're obviously not writing, but... This has caught my imagination, as a matter of fact. A good deal more than Pop Art itself. Although at first I didn't realize the

difference. And I'm beginning to now.

Bob: Well I think what Pop Art is, is just a new subject matter for artists who don't know what else to do. ... For painters who don't know what else to paint. And for us too. But I feel there are other forms. And I'm intent upon somehow inventing them. Or finding them. Or doing them. And this is why Kaprow, I think, is important. And is more important than the Pop artists - is, that if nothing else, Kaprow, at least, is trying to do things with new and personal form.

Bici: What is the importance of the novelty here? You and Brecht and Kaprow are all looking for a new way.

Bob: I think the only value is - well, in the first place, it would be different for all of us. On the one hand, there's this great technology that one would wish could be used for artistic intent, or artistic purposes. Artists would like to be able to use all of the technical things that we now know about, and that we feel could be used in art forms.

Bici: Because why not.?

Bob: Because they're here except they happen to be expensive. I think there's that, on the one hand. And then, on the other hand, there's the rejection of that, and the desire to do something new, in the way technology is new - but *without* technology. So that it's somehow a new, personal invention. And perhaps, in a way, it's competitive with the great strides of technology. And maybe a resentment - I don't know.

Bici: You used the word 'personal' a minute ago. Which might be the point of opposition to technology: that it *is* personal and is reasserting the personal. ... Is that a factor or not? Is there any sense of helplessness in the face of the huge automation or something of the sort?

Bob: Well, for myself, no. Except what I read, and seem to think is happening to people. The way people are living... What kinds of houses are being built... The way the landscape is being desecrated... All the stuff we think we object to. I feel this strongly. Would prefer it not to happen.

Bici: How does what you're doing make any difference? It isn't going to prevent the bulldozers from pushing the trees down. Or carpenters from putting up 75 houses in a row that look exactly the same...

Bob: No it doesn't.

Bici: It's not going to *that*, but it obviously does something.

Bob: You mean, for people? Or myself?

Bici: Well, I don't know. That's what I'm wondering. ... And also: is it a protest? Or an assertion? An affirmation of some kind? A combination?

Bob: Well, I would say that five percent of the time, it might be slightly protest. But that is not my main concern, really. I don't really know what my main concern is except a way to - try to find a way to say what I somehow must say. I'm not really sure what that is -

Bici: which you haven't defined. And you're probably better off not having it defined.

Bob: Well, I don't think it can be defined, because I think it's everything.

Bici: Yeah. ... Which, comes mighty close to something I've been wondering about a good deal, which is the presence of Zen any place in any of these manifestations of art.

Bob: Well, there's been some influence. No doubt about that.

Bici: On whom?

Bob: On Kaprow and Brecht and on myself. But I don't understand very much - the impact on myself, except that it has something to do with a kind of directness that is akin to some of the direct insights that a novice would obtain in Zen training. But since I really don't know what that is - never had that experience - I'm kind of guessing, shooting in the dark.

Bici: I've asked a number of people, well, particularly Ivan [Karp] and Roy [Lichtenstein], about the influence of Zen on the Pop Art thing, and they were both emphatic to say no - there was no such influence. And, I gathered - well, Roy said to me one time - he felt that Zen applied much more to Abstract Expressionism, which seemed a very strange remark.

Bob: I think I can understand what he meant about that.

Bici: Well, I think it's a question of defining Zen. And I think what you and I are talking about, and your work, is one thing. And I think that Abstract Expressionism - if it enters in there - would be another manifestation. And possibly some of the Pop Art would be still a third thing. And it's a very strange thing: It's just a matter of definition.

Bob: You know, I would say, probably, that, except for someone like John Cage, who must understand Zen - if there's something to understand - more than any of the rest of us - 'cause he studied it for so long ...

Bici: He did.

Bob: Yeah. And has been involved with it and worked with Zen principles. And has composed using Zen ideas, like, the *Book of Changes*.

Bici: I thought that was Taoist.

Bob: I guess it is, but isn't it related to Zen?

Bici: Very much.

Bob: Many of the artists - I don't believe - really, are this involved with Zen. But I think they have a feeling for it. For the nature of Zen. Or the nature *in* Zen. And the economy of saying something about Nature.

Bici: The instantaneous character of it.

Bob: The instantaneous, the immediate, and economical means of making a statement. It seems to me Zen is most economical. You know, there's no bullshit about Zen.



Reading and performing selections from *The Friday Book of White Noise*: “The script was a scroll, ends attached with a half-twist, so I was reading from a moebius strip; when we got to the beginning, we stopped.” - Nye

Café au Gogo 1965

Figures 30 (left) and 31 (below)
Photographer unknown..



The Mushroom Team 1964

Both Geoff and I were dedicated foragers, and, given the lack of fresh food in stores¹ at the time, we thrived on glasswort, goose tongue, orach, cat tails, ... and mushrooms, which we found in profusion. Any good weather. after a few wet days, we would don our rubber boots, grab our pen knives and baskets, and head out for the pasture lands where *Agaricus campestris* would sometimes fill a basket with ten or twelve pounds of beauties to be strung up over the wood stove to dry. Other times, the woods yielded a bounty of boletes and many other varieties, which we studied and added to our ever-increasing repertoire. Paramount among these were *Cantharellus cibarius*, the common chanterelle. Some summers they were so plentiful that I devised a system of fiberglass screens to dry them over the stove. We ate them, saved them, dried, in glass jars, pickled them, gave them to friends. Some days, the hunt would get quite competitive and when I found three athletic shirts with shoulder patches the color of chanterelles, I imagined a ‘mushroom’ team. and fitted them out with lettering to match. I dreamed of alternate teams: the Boletes, the Russulas, and (with skull and cross bones) the Amanitas. But Chanterelles were the only shirts that got made - largely because I never found any similar shirts in other colors.



1. The west coast of Cape Breton Island, Nova Scotia

Figure 32: *Mushroom Team Shirt*. . Photo: Cai Xi Silver.

Memories in Flux

In the early '60s, I became aware of Fluxus and even then the talk was very much about both Fluxus and the artists' loft housing movement coordinated by George Maciunas.

Geoff Hendricks and I were married in June of 1961. And Geoff was an instructor in the art department at Douglass College, the women's division of Rutgers University, in New Brunswick, NJ. Douglass was a nexus of innovation in the arts, in those days. I heard about different people who taught there: Allan Kaprow, Roy Lichtenstein, Bob Watts, George Brecht, Hui Ka Kwong, and George Segal, among others, and I met them and got to know them gradually, some better than others.

In March 1961, I participated in "A Spring Happening" by Allan Kaprow. I was entranced. It consisted of a narrow walkway on several levels, up ladders and down steps, through which the 'audience' was directed to go, and in which we were exposed to sights and sounds, light rising (dawn) to brightness, and again fading toward the end. There were various stopping places to watch people doing enigmatic things in small spaces, and overhead there were the popping, sizzling sounds (and smell?) of frying bacon. There were many sounds - car motors, milk bottles rattling, someone singing, a splashing shower ... those sorts of things.

One Fall day, Kaprow enlisted students, friends, and other artists to co-create a banquet on long tables, out-of-doors. It was to have been along the grassy verge of one of the New Jersey highways, but there was a legal objection, perhaps on account of creating a distraction that could have caused an accident. At any rate, it was diverted to a side road, off the highway, and, as it happened, it was the road to a dump, which, although visibility from the highway was sacrificed to safety, was a rather nice, ironic twist, in itself.

We gathered, bringing folding tables and many chairs, silverware, plates and serving dishes, glasses, candelabra, tablecloths and cloth napkins, and food - an entire Thanksgiving dinner, including wine and all the fixings. We set a long, impeccably laid out banquet table. And then we all got in our cars and departed, leaving the banquet in all its splendor for whomever to find, presumably to their great surprise. I never heard any account of the aftermath. It was, of course, two actions in one: first, it was the act of creating the banquet, and then it was whatever happened after. Was it vandalized? Was it eaten - by hoboes? by people driving to the dump?... by wild creatures? Was it disassembled by sanitation workers and carried to the landfill? I have no idea. I never heard.

Another piece of his, in which Geoff and I participated, consisted in going to the Greystone Hotel on Manhattan's West Side, and taking a room. We were to enter the room with certain supplies, make love on the bed, and then dress and proceed to drape the entire room with black plastic - windows, bathroom, furniture and all, and then depart. It was quite spooky. We hoped that a chambermaid would not have a heart attack when she came in to clean.

One other piece took place in the basement or sub-basement of an enormous structure, in the Bronx, I believe. We - a good many people, not all of whom I knew - gathered there, and dispersed throughout the space, to do whatever we chose. I found a fairly large niche pretty high up on one wall. It was, like the whole space, quite rough, with some rubble here and there, and much dust and some industrial debris. Up there, I found a long rod with a kink or two in it which, when I twisted

it, gave out a rather soothing, regular, rattling or thumping sound. I settled in happily and enjoyed making this kind of rudimentary music for a couple of hours, and soon I was chanting something I made up: a series of “Tea Parties” which were made up of unlikely pairings of objects. The one I particularly remember was: “Tea Party: Eyecups and Sausages.”

I spent a good deal of time talking to various of these folks, when Geoff would take me out to college events, or to performances or parties that were happening in the City. Letty and I became friends. Roy was more reserved, but always genial - a good host - and willing to talk about his work and life, a connection that turned into a series of taped interviews with artists, which are now in the archives of the Roy Lichtenstein Foundation, in New York. Roy was the first one I interviewed, but I also did one with Bob Watts¹, one with Ivan Karp - Sidney Janis's lieutenant at the Gallery - and one with Hui Ka Kwong.

That would have been in 1963, when I was taking William Rubin's (modern art history) class at Sarah Lawrence, had seen the New Realists show at Janis, and wanted to write my term paper on What Was Happening Right Now, which Rubin reluctantly allowed me to do, instead of writing on Klée or Kandinsky or Gorky or Motherwell or Kline. (Those artists had already been studied to death - I wanted to go where no art historian had gone before!) Eventually, Rubin said OK, and when I presented my paper, of which there was only one copy, he first said he was thinking of publishing it - as his! - and when I objected, he kept the paper and I never saw it again. Ah, groves of acadème!

Bob Watts and I got to be really good friends, and I also had quite a lot of contact with George Brecht, who was collaborating with Bob on such extravaganzas as the Yam Festival, showcasing many artists's work, including their own. Watts and Brecht were solidly into Fluxus, and I spent many delightful afternoons at Watts's place in New Jersey eating, swimming, and talking. Looking at Bob's work: things like a cast iron bee-hive-shaped piece that had originally housed a tape measure, but now held a long screed in telegram format, thus: “**OUR FATHER WHO ART IN HEAVEN STOP HALLOWED BE THY NAME STOP**” etc., on to the end. It was a piece I loved. He also showed me his Flux Post Office stamps, which came out of a stamp machine and looked enough like real stamps that people actually tried to mail letters with them - and I think perhaps some actually got through.

Another of the artists we spent time with at his place in NJ was George Segal. He had big gatherings at his farm (not a working farm in the ordinary sense) in which all sorts of artists showed up, students included, and did various performances and constructed (or deconstructed) objects of many kinds. With beer and picnic lunches, these were cheerfully disorderly free-for-alls, which Segal allowed, but didn't always appreciate, as when someone took an air drill to the floor of the large chicken house to bury a dishonorably-discharged TV set, or when the spirit moved a gaggle of inebriated students to festoon a large tree with rolls of toilet paper. I had never seen this done before, but suffice it to say that it took a lot longer (weeks) for the paper to come down than it did going up. This was the locale where George made the plaster-cast figures for which he became renowned. They were astonishingly like the people whom he used as armatures, many in arrested gestures so that it appeared that they would follow through - or speak - at any moment. I was pregnant with my first child, and quite ‘out there’ in form, and I asked him to make a cast of me, but he wouldn't, because he was afraid that harm might come to the unborn.

I was seriously taken with George Brecht's work. It had a definite Zen feel to it. He did a series of small card events, like, “Egg Event: At least one egg.” I loved them! Some years later, in the ground floor entrance to the Douglass Art Department building, he realized a piece by appropriation. It was a long row of brass coat hooks - maybe 50 or more of them - in a single line on an oak board stretching

from the door for maybe 20 feet, to an adjoining corridor. He had a brass plaque made and screwed it to the leading end of the row. It said, "**ATTACHMENT - A LIMITLESS EVENT.**" George's work, and Yoko Ono's were major influences on me as I began to think about, and eventually create, artworks of my own. Sequentially speaking, Brecht's influence came first. Come to think of it, on one of my cards (see next paragraph) was a double oval in yellow-orange. It said, "**EGG EVENT: VERY LARGE EGGS THAT GET OPENED.**" I still have a lot of affection for this series, and a very few complete sets left. I was definitely into eggs (and reproduction) in those days. Our daughter, Tyche, was born in 1964, and later on, on two occasions, I made editions of a dozen eggs, each embedded in a plaster cube: "**EGG/TIME EVENT: ONE HEN EGG - DO NOT OPEN FOR 100 YEARS.**" Later, when son Bracken was born, I sent a square card as a birth announcement, "New Boy Event" with his birth date, name, and weight, that looked like one of the plaster-encased Egg/Time Event pieces.

With Yoko, it was much more a give-and-take between us. Sometimes our kids played together in one or another park while Yoko and I sat and talked. Mostly, I think, our conversation was about the perplexes of our lives and what it was like raising children and trying to get on with our work as artists and writers. Sometimes we bounced off each other, as when I began publishing small pieces in the Black Thumb Press, which I founded. I had the idea of sending postcard-size cards with words and/or pictures, and Geoff joined in with some. We sent them one at a time to people we knew who we thought would get a kick out of them and eventually other artists got interested and offered work for publication. (This might have started around 1965 or 1966.) I published a piece of Watts's, one by Alison Knowles, Ely Raman, and various others ... and one by Yoko Ono, which was a vertical format with an instruction at the bottom: "Cut along the above dotted line." There was no dotted line, however. My rejoinder to that was a (horizontal) card I sent her which said, on the first line, "Dear Yoko" and on the third line, "love, Bici". The line in between was straight-stitch machine sewing, white thread on the white card, all the way across, with the loose ends of the thread hanging off the edges. (I made a copy for myself, which I still have.)

I remember an amazing installation in 1966 that Yoko and three other artists made. It was a realization of a piece of Yoko's, called *The Stone*. It was at the Judson Gallery, below street level, and it was shown at night. We went down the steps and into a reception area, where we were each given a black, crepe, body-size envelope called an Eye Bag, asked to remove our shoes, and then we entered a handsomely-constructed, large cube of white, translucent fabric stretched on a structure of natural wood, pegged, Japanese-style, and very spare and clean, with tatami mats on the floor. We were told that we could put on the Eye Bag and use it in any way we chose - to sit and meditate, to undress, to do yoga, or just lie still or move around. The light was bright, initially, but it faded and rose again, repeatedly, while a tape played Japanese flute music in an endless circular loop, and words were projected on the white walls, from outside. The effect was timeless and very peaceful. Time slithered away, and what seemed like hours - or a lifetime - may have been as little as twenty minutes. I wrote a piece, afterwards - sort of a poem - to describe the trancelike feeling of my experience in that environment: *In the Stone*.

¹. See pp. 35-37 in this book.

In The Stone

1966

The Stone was a meditation environment created by Yoko Ono and friends in New York City in 1966, and presented at Judson Memorial Church.

The participant was given a soft, black crepe bag large enough to crawl into and sit, stand, lie, undress, wriggle, or whatever, in an approximately 8-foot cube of white, translucent fabric and carefully pegged, unfinished lumber, in the Japanese tradition of craftsmanship. Bright lights flashed on and off in a repeating pattern, and words were projected from a source outside the cube onto the walls, while a tape loop of flute and guitar sounded softly from above. Quickly accustomed to this shifting but restful environment, the visitor could settle down quietly - or thumb and gyrate, as s/he preferred - and remain inside for as long as s/he desired.

The following is the poet's memory of her own experience in *The Stone* in which she sat and received these impressions during a visit of perhaps 20 to 45 minutes.

As a choral piece, *In the Stone* is intended to be read once by the leader, then on-
cintended to be read once by the leader, then once with two voices, the third with three, not quite in unison, and the fourth with all voices available, each one starting at slightly different times so that a blurring of overlapping voices is formed, swelling, and then fading away, as each reader comes to the end of his/her reading of the stanza, down to the last voice speaking alone.

in the stone : birds woke up and morning came : in
the stone : frogs sang in the dark : in the stone :
i could not count to ten : in the stone : a whole
day passed between the start of one breath and the
end of the next : in the stone : i was a monk, an
inchworm, and a sailboat

in the stone : birds woke up and morning came : in
in the stone : birds woke up and morning came : in
the stone : frogs sang in the dark : in the stone :
the stone : frogs sang in the dark : in the stone :
i could not count to ten : in the stone : a whole
i could not count to ten : in the stone : a whole
day passed between the start of one breath and the
day passed between the start of one breath and the
end of the next : in the stone : i was a monk, an
end of the next : in the stone : i was a monk, an
inchworm, and a sailboat
inchworm, and a sailboat

in the stone : birds woke up and morning came : in
the stone : frogs sang in the dark : in the stone :
i could not count to ten : in the stone : a whole
day passed between the start of one breath and the
end of the next : in the stone : i was a monk, an
inchworm, and a sailboat

in the stone : birds woke up and morning came : in
the stone : frogs sang in the dark : in the stone :
i could not count to ten : in the stone : a whole
day passed between the start of one breath and the
end of the next : in the stone : i was a monk, an
inchworm, and a sailboat

Objects of Concern

1984-2014



Figure 33. *Objects of Concern* contains items I have rescued at one time or another. Items with stories. Some arouse a memory of a certain event or a favored place, some kept because they were pretty, or shiny, or curiously fashioned, some that I thought might come in handy some day as part of a yet-to-be-created art work. A few medicine bottle lids said A M 1, but as I was about to throw them away, I saw that they seemed to be asking, AM I?

[photo: Cai Xi Silver]

Conjurer

(Tyche at her birth)

She was resplendent then
Radiant, surpassing . . .
When, like an inch of steel
Drawn through the moment's heart
Half stood like half, apart
Dry in their yearning ~

Scarf in the air, afloat
Bisect, unfalling ~
Hers was the moment then . . .
Mine the recalling

1964

Observant

(Bracken on his way)

If I walked down the street as completely
As my two-year-old son
I would never get
To the end of the block

1969

a silent dinner

Bici Hendricks

7 p.m. Guests arrive

No talking after leaving elevator on twelfth floor.

Door is unlocked. Guests may ring and wait to be received, or walk in immediately, according to personal preference.

If weather is foul, leave boots, umbrellas, etc. , outside door on paper provided. Coats may be left on bed in master bedroom.

Beverage and glasses will be found on a table. Each guest helps himself. Guests pass hors d'oeuvres. Stand or sit .

7:30 Dinner is served

Food is placed buffet-style on dining room table. Guests help themselves. Eat standing or sitting.

8:30 Dessert and coffee, mints

On table. Guests help themselves and/or each other.

Directions will be provided for those wishing to participate in them. Guests may read, enough although they should choose something they would not ordinarily try. Pencil and paper should not be used as a substitute for conversation. Words, throughout, may be spoken, singly or in combination, but only as the speaker is strongly moved to use them, and then not as conversational elements, but as short pieces in themselves.

It would greatly enhance the effectiveness of the evening if guests would refrain from smoking. This is considered as another kind of silence.

9:30 Talking resumes: In the form of asking questions only

10:30 Normal conversation and discussion

Guests leave as they choose.

30 January 1966

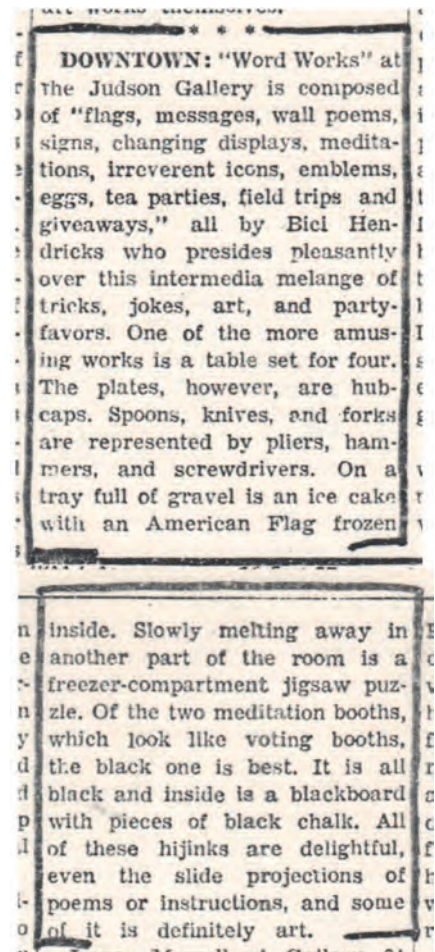


Figure 34. John Perrault's review of the art scene, and specifically of the *Word Works* show at Judson Gallery. Grateful acknowledgment to the *Village Voice* is made for permission to excerpt from the John Perrault article, December 22, 1966, page 13. More about this, pages 50-52.

Annual New York Festivals of the Avant Garde

1966-1978

Annual New York Festival(s) of the Avant Garde in which I participated:

4 - Central Park at Observatory Pond - 1966

- Washed (clean!) cotton birdseye diapers and hung with a United Nations flag emblem painted on a diaper. I was criticized erroneously by former Parks Commissioner Robert Moses in the papers for the diapers being dirty - they weren't. (Image on next page of the washing.)

5- Staten Island Ferry (the JFK) - 1967

- Stamped people's hands with the word "IF". When asked about this, I said, "It leads to new ways of seeing."

6. - Parade in Central Park - 1968

- Carried *Calligraphies*, suspended from helium balloons

7 - Ward's Island in the East River. 1969. A World's Fair of Artists. I created a Pavilion of Litter, and also supplied two readimades: Port-o-sans, which I rented for the occasion. (My rationale was, "What is common to all carnivals and fairs?" My answer was, (1) litter, and (2) a need for sanitary facilities. The Parks Department of New York City gratefully gave me a green canvas bag and a stick with a metal point for picking up and carrying litter to the Litter Pavilion. They were completely amazed that anyone would pick up trash. They thought artists would only make a big mess and leave it behind for someone else to deal with. I scored about 6 large-size bags full, all nicely nestled in the silo (Pavilion) we built.

#8 - The Armory - 1971 - I don't remember what I did. Dick Higgins passed out questionnaires asking "How do you go up and down stairs?" I answered, "Never empty-handed." Dick also released a number of white mice, which visited Geoff and climbed all over him for a good many hours.

(I don't know what happened to 1970.)

#9 - Pier 16 - 1972

I did some kind of bodywork on people who lay supine on a long wooden bench. Had a really nice connection with Pauline Oliveiras, a composer and friend of Alison's, particularly.

#10 - Grand Central Terminal / a baggage car on a siding. 1973.

I brought a push broom and swept the car out and also the platform, while other artists were doing their "thing"s in and around the railroad car.

last one: # 14 - 1978 It was in Cambridge, MA, where I was then living, and was held along the banks of the Charles River. I set up a small camping tent with a sign in front, saying I was doing readings as a tool to help people.- and by the time the tent was open for business there were about 8 people lined up, waiting. I did short-form readings (about 15 minutes each,) for hours until I couldn't move my tongue any more, my mouth was so dry. After a break, I continued for another two or three hours.

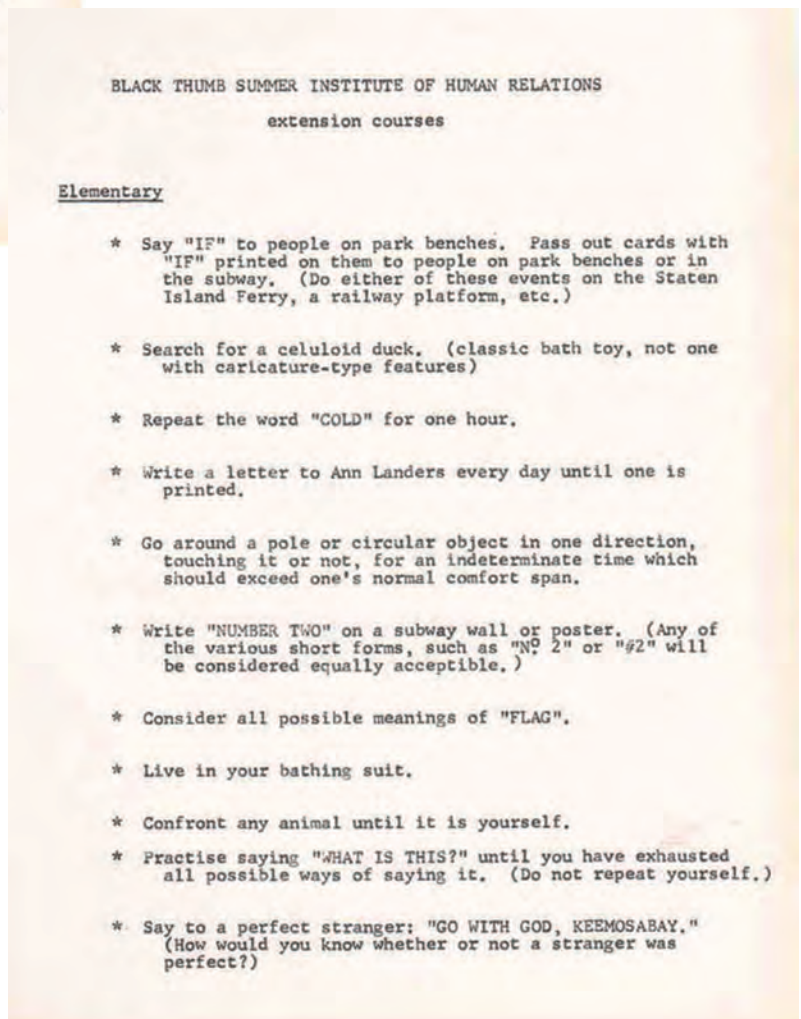
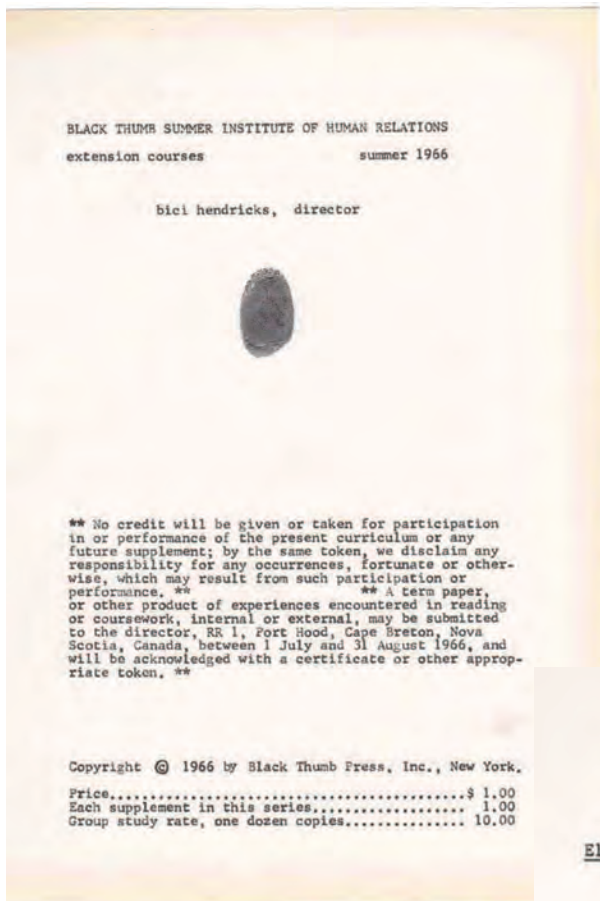


Figure 35: *Washing Clean Diapers in the Central Park Reflecting Pond.* Photo: Geoffrey Hendricks

Black Thumb Summer Institute of Human Relations

Bici Hendricks

Figure 36: Black Thumb Summer Institute of Human Relations Extension Courses, Summer 1966, Seven pages arranged on three sheets. Supplement One, the last three pages, are arranged on a single page, p. 49.



Intermediate

- ** Stand in plastic packages on a subway platform during morning rush hour.
- ** Spend a whole afternoon driving around the cloverleaf of a major artery. (at least 4 hours, say 1-5 pm)
- ** Swim for a whole afternoon in the sky.
- ** Wipe out the frying pan with a handful of grass; plunge the knives into clean sand.
- ** Undress in a theater seat during a performance. If you have managed this without attracting attention, you may dress again, unobtrusively.
- ** Be a potato for several days.
- ** Lie on your back in a green place that is pleasant and quiet; dig sky.
- ** Practise saying "WHAT IS THIS?" until you have exhausted all possible answers. (Do not repeat yourself.)
- ** Consider a news item as myth. Elaborate, then condense.
- ** Water a flag and see it grow.
- ** Make the world's largest collection of
 - a) wavy lines
 - b) dried waterfalls
 - c) other.
- ** Soil water. Water soil.

Advanced

- *** Hang a set of tools in a hall coat closet. (gardeners' or woodsmen's tools)
- *** Send water letters.
- *** Smell your own scalp, navel, toenails.
- *** Consider a news item as a dream.
- *** Defrost the American flag.
- *** Practise saying "WHAT IS THIS?" until you have exhausted yourself. (Do not repeat yourself.)
- *** Be concrete
 - a) in the country
 - b) in the city
 - c) in the water
 - d) in bed.
- *** Flood the subway with Coca-Cola.
- *** Dig for gold. (This should be performed spontaneously in any place, time, and manner that may occur to you, and may be repeated, ad lib.)
- *** Swim for an hour in your own blood. (internal or external)
- *** Strike root.
- *** Think fast.

Remembering *Word Work*:

An exhibition, Dec. 1966 - Jan.1967

Reprinted with permission of Judson Memorial Church from *Memories of Judson House*, eds. Elly Dickason and Jerry G. Dickason (New York: Judson Church, 2000), 321-325.

See also the review by John Perrault excerpted earlier in this book, p. 44.

It began for me one evening late in the fall of 1966, when Jon Hendricks was over to dinner. I showed him some of my work, and he asked me point blank if I would like to have a show at the Judson Gallery. Then, reflecting that almost my entire oeuvre consisted of a series of notebooks, much of it in the form of events and abstruse conceptual whatnots, that I had a scant three weeks to prepare, and that I had a two-and-a-half-year-old daughter and was entering my third trimester with child number two and had never had a show before, I had a pretty good case of panic.

The panic passed, and I settled down to work, creating tangible realizations of the scribbled notations in my journals. Since I am a poet, and the pieces had their genesis in words on a page, we called the show “Word Work.” Pretty quickly, with a lot of infrastructure support from Geoff, logistical assistance from Jon, and encouragement from both, it came together.

I remember the black, wrought-iron railing with sections missing, smeared with many coats of shiny black paint ... the clanging metal stairs down to that mysterious, dingy - almost clandestine - space that was a tabula rasa, all mine to transform and adorn the way I liked. I remember the clink of the latch on the heavy iron gate and the way the gate rang when it slammed. I remember trudging up and down those steps - the baby out to here - carrying crates of objects, lumber, and furniture past the black-and-white sign Jon had painted to announce the show.

The show opened on December 2. There were found objects: a flag misprinted with all the stars pointing down; everyday materials transformed in various ways: a small restaurant sign with letters pressed into the slots spelling DAILY SPECIAL: bread; a pair of found deco chairs I had painted, one black, one white - my “Separate But Equal Chairs”; four Birdseye diapers pinned to a clothesline, one dyed pale blue and painted with the emblem of the United Nations flag.

There were Word Boxes (moving message displays). I first saw one of these mechanical light boxes in a bank window, circulating a message about interest rates, on about a 30 to 40-second cycle. These mechanical boxes were a common sight in bank and store windows. I immediately thought about what I could fit in that format: tiny event scores, haiku, and tightly-composed quatrains. Then I ordered about a dozen different ‘moving message displays’ to fit them with WordWork. The boxes consisted of a small motor, and rollers, around which was arranged a neoprene tape or ribbon approximately four inches high with a joined loop of about six feet. The rollers helped the tape fold back on itself so it would circulate, displaying any message that had been punched into the tape as it passed in front of a fluorescent tube and behind a pebbly glass window. Any message so displayed would repeat endlessly until the motor was turned off or the tape was changed for another message.

We built two booths. The first one was painted black, with a black burlap curtain

Figures 37 a-i, most reprised here from other locations in the book:

This page, top to bottom:

a) *Word Work* exhibition location, street view (see p. 17)

b) *Universal Laundry* (p. 43)

c) *Word Work* mechanical boxes (“Whisper”); re-enacted in 2014; photo: Sur Rodney (Sur).

Facing page, top to bottom:

d) Bici balancing an egg (p. 6); photo by Peter Moore, © Barbara Moore / Licensed by VAGA, NY.

e) *Language Box* (p. 25)

f) “Defrost the American Flag” (p. 22)

g) *Egg/Time Event* (p. 11)

h) *Neo/N (Über alles)* (p. 19)

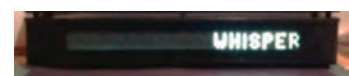
i) *Dinner Service* (p. 53).



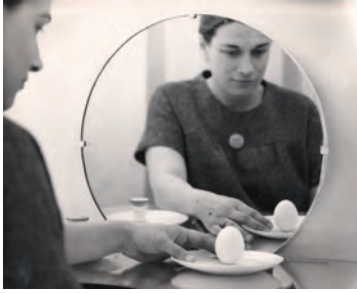
a



b



c



d



e



f



g



h



i

across the front, and a blackboard inside with an eraser and a black chalk. To make sure the booth was dark enough, I painted the ceiling black. On top of the booth sat a slide projector that played a continuous series of typed “Events” on a nearby wall: instructions such as “Go for a mushroom walk (a) in the Metropolitan Museum, (b) on the Staten Island Ferry,” or “Imagine that today’s newspaper is a book of mythology.” Maybe today, that would need to be changed to “Imagine that today’s newspaper is an episode from a Stephen King novel.” Opposite the black booth was its counterpart in white: white walls, white burlap, bright white overhead light, and inside a white vanity table with round mirror and a white chair to sit on. On the glass surface were two white saucers with dymo label instructions. One held a needle and white thread (**THREAD A NEEDLE**), the other a white egg (**BALANCE AN EGG**).

People reported that they enjoyed going into these mini meditation spaces and making little performances for themselves with the materials provided. The black booth, especially, evoked thoughts of confessionals, voting booths, and dark corners where you could write any messages or draw graffiti with absolute privacy and freedom.

There were tables displaying my *Language Box*, *Punctuation Poems*, and *Egg Time Events*, and there were several ice pieces: *Ice Jigsaw Puzzle*, *Ice Candles*, and an ice disk with a crumpled American flag embedded in it, lying on a bed of beach pebbles (*Defrost the American Flag*), all of which had to be made anew and toted down from 104th Street every Friday, Saturday, and Sunday for the show’s six-week run. I had difficulty unmolding the jigsaw pieces at the opening, and one of the knobs broke off. Dick Higgins popped it in his wine glass. “I’ve never had sculpture in my drink before,” he chuckled, and proceeded to put the puzzle together.

There was a bright-red, slat-back rocking chair with a square blue cushion with white stars sewn on it. When the chair was placed against a white wall, the ensemble instantly turned into a flag (*American Rock #1*).

Two major pieces—both as to size and complexity (and as to future notoriety). One piece was a neon sign that flashed, in steady yellow capitals, “U S,” and, in rapid blue flashes, an umlaut over the U and the letters “ber alle” between the U and the S, so that the total effect was

U S
Über alleS

The other piece was *Dinner Service*, a table set with a rainbow cloth with Ford hubcaps as plates; empty Coca-Cola bottles for glassware; a windshield-wiping paper towel and a hammer, screwdriver, and pliers to complete each place setting.

At the *Happening* and *Fluxus Retrospective* in Cologne, in 1971, the table was spread with a 5 x 8 foot American flag instead of the rainbow cloth. The letters “US” - instead of “Deutschland,” as in the German anthem - were disturbing to Germans and older Americans alike, though most younger viewers needed historical fill-in.

This flag imagery, which may have been one of the precursors of the Judson Flag Show (1969), was born in the context of U.S. aggression in Vietnam, just as the black and white chairs were conceived against the backdrop of our national struggle toward racial equality and justice.

Several encounters I had at the show were especially memorable. One was with the photographer Diane Arbus, who liked the work a lot. Another was with art critic John Gruen, whose book *The New Bohemia* had just been published; he came up and asked me if I was in the book!

All of this work, however iconoclastic or playful some of it was, had a devotional quality that was intensified by the rough, underground character of the space itself. It proceeded from a love of the natural and the ordinary, delight at the surprise of discovery, and outrage at atrocious events and attitudes. In this respect, my work was a form of moral statement, abstracted and torqued and right at home in a church whose ministers authored cutting-edge, innovative social programs and wild, high-camp operatic extravaganzas and whose front entrance carried a sign tallying the weekly body count on both sides as the Vietnam War raged on.

The ice pieces, to my mind, were accelerated examples of the ephemeral nature of all persons, works, and materials. The Sphinx abraded by the desert sands and the sulfurous atmosphere of Florence eroding Michelangelo's David so badly that it had to be moved to an indoor location are only two versions of the same phenomenon.

The show closed in January 1967, a month before my son was born (on February 9, the night of Charlotte Moonman's arrest at her Town Hall concert for playing the cello barebreasted). The show was revived on February 24 as an intermission and post-show diversion for Judson Poets Theater goes attending a performance of the Gertrude Stein/Al Carmines amazing *What Happened* and song and-dance pieces by several other artists.

Figure 38. facing page, image above: Dinner Service, re-enacted 2014, Brattleboro, VT, photo: Cai Xi Silver.

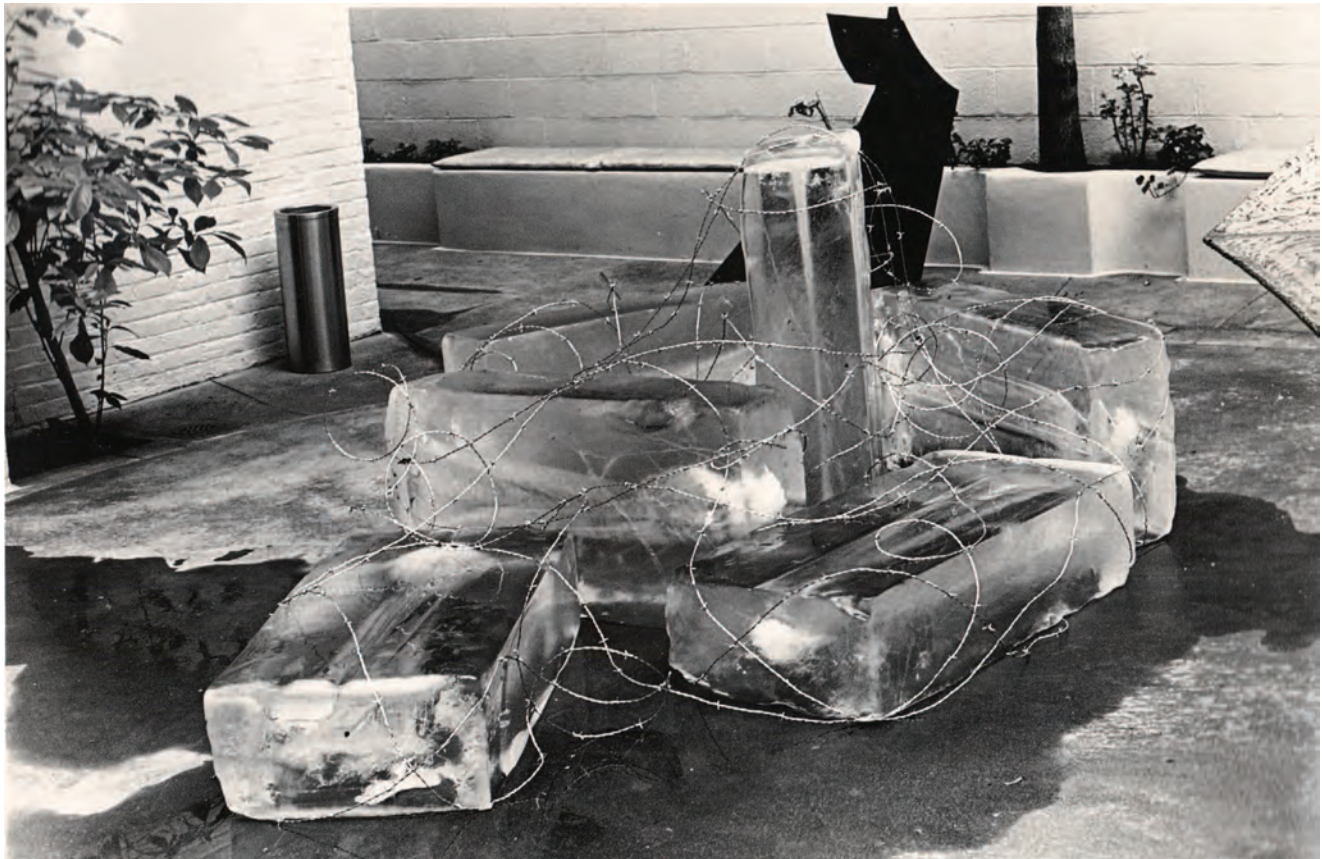
The first version of Dinner Service evolved innocently enough as a piece scribbled somewhere in *The Friday Book of White Noise*, I think. It came to life for my first show at Judson Gallery 1966-67, and was laid out on a long piece of diaphanous, rainbow-colored cloth upon a long table. Above it Neo/N was blinking: U S Über alleS, and several of my Calligraphies adorned the other wall.

Place settings: At a car junk dealer somewhere in the Bronx, we asked for Ford hubcaps, found three that matched, and one that sorta looked like them, but really wasn't part of the set. And we got some lug nuts there too. The glassware was four Coca-cola bottles. The "silverware" were tools, with windshield wiping papers for the napkins.

I dubbed it Dinner Service, well aware of the ironic use of the word service and its many meanings of ritual and the sacrificial aspect of giving to others, either food or assistance of any kind ... including, of course, the skills which mechanics expend upon one's car. At Judson Church, each Sunday, the proceedings would end with Howard Moody stepping forward and saying, "And now, the Service Begins." He meant, of course, taking anything which one had gleaned during the meeting for worship - outside, into the community. It was, perhaps, the most profound thing I ever heard anybody say in that, or possibly any other religious ceremony.

1970. By the time of the Happening and Fluxus Retrospective in Germany, Neo/N and Dinner Service were again shown together, and I had changed the rainbow cloth for a 5' x 8' American flag.

Facing page, Figure 39, image below: Untitled. installation, ice and barbed wire, at Finch College Museum's Destruction In Art show, 1968. Photo: Julie Abeles. Text about this image: pp. 66-67.



Rubbings

June 3, 1967. Figure 40, 2 pages.

R U B B I N G

A BLACK THUMB EVENT

date:

Saturday, 3 June 1967

meeting place:

Bryant Park, NYC - promptly at 2 pm
(Library side, near WCB's statue)

meet again:

Washington Square Park, NYC - 6 pm sharp
(South Gate, opposite Judson Memorial Church)

object:

to disperse throughout Manhattan making rubbings
of manhole covers and other indigenous and interesting
city surfaces.

Rubbings may be kept, exchanged, or donated to
Judson Church to be sold for the benefit of their
arts program.

It would be interesting if each rubbing were inscribed
as to location, date, and person making the rubbing;
also (if more than one is made on the same object),
number of the rubbing and size of the edition.

Example:

SW Corner Amsterdam Av & 100 St, NYC 3 VI 67
7/11 Bici Hendricks

beer party

in Judson Student House will follow meeting at 6:pm.
Please gather promptly to keep door duty at a minimum,
and bring tickets, which will be issued at Bryant Park.

materials:

bring your own.....bring plenty!

(suggestions overleaf)

bring:

large sheets of paper (at least 24" wide and as long or longer; Troya or other rice paper is good for the purpose)

portfolio, cardboard tubes, or other means of transporting papers without folding

graphite sticks, pastels, oil or wax crayons, layout sticks, or whatever will work

masking tape to hold paper in place

clear fixitive spray

whisk broom to clean area of grit and loose dirt before starting rubbing

Wash n Dry tissues

wear:

comfortable clothes for walking, stooping, and dirty work

please:

respect traffic laws and public and private property

don't address the group while in the park (we don't have a permit); Park Dept. is fidgety about this, which is why all this is in writing

and

please don't litter



IN CASE OF WET WEATHER, EVENT WILL BE CANCELLED

Ordeals

August 29, 1967.

Figure 41, 2 pages: 2-page final exam and report card - page 56 and 57.

Figure 42, 1 page: Ordeals program, list of participants, and bios of presenters - page 58.

About this time, the Judson arts program was getting a good deal of publicity, which resulted in the creation of several “catered” productions. One was *Conjunctions* in which Larry Kornfeld, Geoff, and I participated along with Roland Turner, Arlene Rothlein, and Florence Tarlow, among others.

Another event, staged all over the premises at Judson, was *Ordeals* (August 1967), a production mounted expressly for the International Congress on Religion, Architecture, and Visual Arts. It was contrived as a fantastic evocation of many of the real-life horrific and humiliating situations visited upon persons and populations all over the world by individuals and groups vested with authority and power.

The masterminds of this enormous undertaking were Al Carmines and Larry Kornfeld, aided and abetted by Carolee Schneemann and myself. Both of us created environment/happenings that augmented the other goings-on. Jon Hendricks was the herculean stage manager, assisted by a cast of dozens, both illustrious and obscure.

The general flow of events was as follows. People entered through the front door of the church, where they were subjected to bureaucratic processing with much shuffling and signing of papers. Then they went up the stairs, where each participant was kissed by a black woman and had a hangman’s noose placed over his or her head (“courtesy of Black Power”) by a silken-voiced black man. Everyone was given a paper cup of blood-colored mashed potatoes to eat. From there, by twelves, the curious and eager priests and nuns, architects, teachers, artists, and scholars were led through a nightmarish sequence that included an intimidating police line-up with bright lights, crawling through a dim passageway, and being photographed on a large, rough wooden cross while being verbally harassed. Immediately thereafter, they passed by a placard carrying a long, nonsensical passage from *Through the Looking Glass* and one of my Word Work boxes under a strobe light. “PAY ATTENTION,” the message warned, “**YOU WILL BE TESTED ON THIS MATERIAL. PAY ATTENTION. YOU WILL BE HELD RESPONSIBLE.**” This was followed by a kindergarten version of a song teaching the children to adore “the one true leader.” Then came nap time on cushions on the floor while listening to a humorous horror tale.

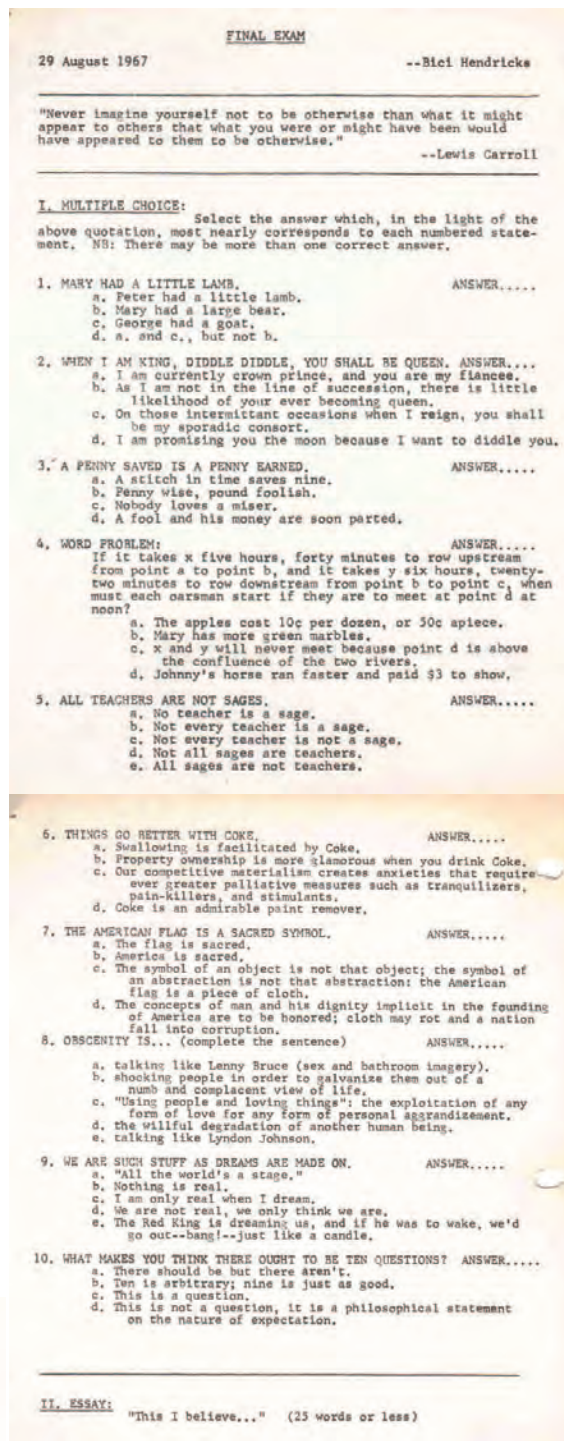
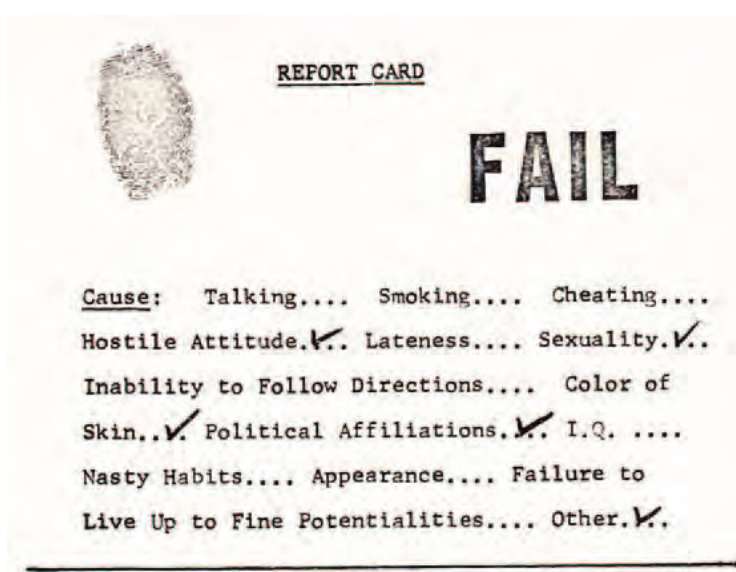
From this point, the participants were led down the stairs in back of the church, where the walls were plastered with lewd and explicit magazine photos, past an open door where a man was seated on a toilet, trousers down around his ankles, and out to the Garden, with music and dim lights, where each participant was escorted to a dancing partner of his or her own sex. Entering the Garden Room, the participants had to pass a man in black wearing a clerical collar who was hacking meat on a butcher block with a huge cleaver.

This was the beginning of my environment, *Final Exam*. The participants were shown to seats at long tables with bluebooks and pencils and were peremptorily told to keep silent. The exam had ten multiple-choice questions, ending with “What makes you think there ought to be ten questions: (a) There should be but there aren’t; (b) Ten

is arbitrary; nine is just as good; (c) This is a question; (d) This is not a question, it is a philosophical statement on the nature of expectation." There was also an essay, "This I believe ..." to be completed in twenty-five words or less, while the exam proctors insulted and harried their charges. As they left, each participant was given a report card stamped "Fail," with predetermined "reasons" for said failure. They were also thumbprinted and received a rubber-stamped "Fail" on the back of their hands.

Then came the enforced flagellation of a nude female mannikin in bondage and a disconcerting journey through Carolee's smothering, pink foam "burial" environment on the way to the "nurse's station," where participants were subjected to pointless "physicals" and humiliating questioning. Abruptly, they were escorted to the side door, which was thrown open as they were told, "Get Out!" The next moment, the heavy wooden door slammed behind them and they were standing on the Thompson Street sidewalk facing bright lights, a TV news camera, and a crowd of onlookers. The feedback that we received from those who wrote to us afterward was that Ordeals caused in many of them an awakening to the daily realities of millions of people throughout the world. It had been a profound and sobering experience that many of them would never forget.

If I have concentrated on my own part in this and other events, it is because, typically, Judson at that time was a place of rich simultaneities. I could be in only one place at a time, and I have more complete and reliable documentation for the work I was involved in. In describing Ordeals, I have relied on remembered descriptions by other people and on a detailed, well-illustrated, unsigned account in the *Boston Sunday Globe* of November 12, 1967.



AL CARMINES is associate minister and director of the arts program at Judson Memorial Church. He teaches at New York University and the Earlham College New York Seminar, and is film columnist for Motive Magazine.

BICI HENDRICKS, founder and president of Black Thumb Press, Inc., is author of Language Box, Punctuation Poems, articles, etc. Her one-man show Word Work was at the Judson Gallery last winter, and her environment Maytricks was part of the Judson Arts Carnival this spring. She has participated in several group shows, among them: "No Art Show", Douglas College, Rutgers, New Jersey, 1966; Intermedia Show at Something Else Gallery, 1966; Intermedia Show, Carnegie Institute of Technology, Pittsburgh, 1967; "Museum of Merchandise", Philadelphia Arts Council, 1967. She produced s i l e n t d i n n e r s in New York, 1965-66, performed in her own pieces at the Avant Garde Festival in Central Park in 1966, and has been seen in happenings by Allan Kaprow, Geoff Hendricks, and Judson Church. She presented slide/lecture/events at Columbia and Hunter Colleges this year and read as co-author with Geoff Hendricks "Selections from The Friday Book of White Noise" at Cafe au Go Go in 1965.

LAWRENCE KORNFELD, resident director at The Judson Poets' Theater, general manager and associate director at the Living Theatre (1957-62), has also directed at Philadelphia Theatre of the Living Arts, Tyrone Guthrie Theater in Minneapolis, and numerous off-Broadway theaters in New York. In association with Mr. Carmines he presented the Easter Sunrise Happening in Washington Square Park and the Thanksgiving Happening at Judson Church in 1966. He is currently staging a musical by Gertrude Stein and Mr. Carmines, casting an off-Broadway production by Mark Mirsky, and planning a happening for the Jewish Sabbath Service. He teaches directing at The New School and a course, New Forms in the Theater, at both The New School and New York University.

CAROLEE SCHNEEMANN was the first painter to choreograph environmental theater for The Judson Dance Theater. She is best known for her happening "Meat Joy", a flesh celebration performed in Paris, London and at Judson Church in 1964. An aerial work of kinetic theater, "Water Light/Water Needle" was presented at St. Marks Church in the Bowery. "Snows", which was part of Angry Arts Week, was given at the Martinique Theater last March. She has just returned from London where she created "Round House", kinetic theater for the International Congress on Dialectics of Liberation. She will create audience-involvement environments for Expo '67 and for Goothe House in New York this fall.

ORDEALS

Judson Memorial Church

August 29, 1967

9:00 P.M.

created by

Al Carmines Bici Hendricks Lawrence Kornfeld Carolee Schneemann

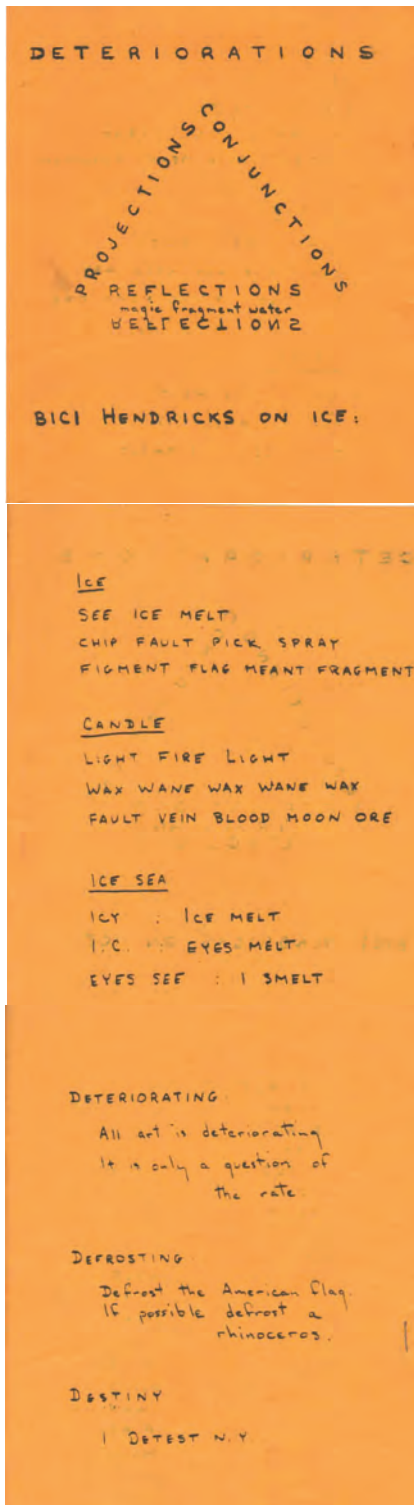
stage manager Jon Hendricks

with

Bea Adler	Grace Goodman	Frank Lilly	Mahler Ryder
Richard Arnsman	Reuben Greenspan	Alan Loonin	Carol Sage
Reathel Bean	James Hardy	Larry Loonin	John Socor
Rober Berk	Carolyn Hendricks	Al Lopez	Michael Steinlauf
Alice Bosveld	Geoff Hendricks	Marilyn Marini	Barbara Stewart
Don Brown	Nathaniel Hendricks	Gary Maxwell	Catharine Stimpson
Louis Brown	Linn Johnson	John Herbert McDowell	Theodore Stinchecum
Terry Burch	Martha Johnson	Kate Millet	Caryl-Joanne Tenney
Michael Burnham	Poppy Johnson	Barbara Moore	James Tenney
Arlene Carmen	Betsy Jones	Mitsou Naslednikov	David Tice
Jacque Lynn Colton	Tom Kilpatrick	Phoebe Neville	Doris Todd
Margot Dodds	Michael Kirby	James O'Haverly	Roland Turner
Cyrelle Forman	Alice Kemp	Sandy Padilla	Walter Vernon
Maria Irene Fornes	Margaret Kornfeld	Mary Peacock	Bruce Wallace
Chris Freeman	H.M. Koutoukas	Carole Peterson	Bob Watts
Douglas Freeman	John Kwitkor	Charles Pickett	Guy Williams
Mark Gabor	Ro Lee	Hugh Pickett	Mary Woronov
Nancy Gabor	Arthur Levin	Lurlino Purvis	Nancy Zala

12 Evenings of Manipulations

October 1967



In October 1967 Judson Gallery was also the scene of Twelve Evenings of Manipulations. On the second evening, I presented some large ice works in the gallery, with more candles and projected word pieces, in a piece called “Deteriorations: BiciHendricks on Ice.” I had been asked to provide icepicks to hasten the melting process, in consequence of another installation, at Trude Heller’s Trik discotheque, where this had been requested—rather against my better judgment for the enhanced entertainment value of viewer participation.

With a three-year-old and a baby, I did not make it to most of these events. I did, however, get to Kate Millett’s installation, a wooden cage of heavy dowels set in two-by-fours, top and bottom; it made a very sturdy enclosure perhaps 8 x 8 feet and 7 or 8 feet high. The audience was courteously escorted to a gap in the bars and asked to go inside, which we all did. There was quite a crowd of us, maybe fifteen or twenty. Suddenly, we became aware that the remaining dowel had been snapped into place, and there we were, in jail. I don’t recall if Kate remained outside the enclosure or whether she and her helpers left the gallery altogether. I rather think she was somewhere where she could see our reactions. These were quite varied, and some were intense: claustrophobia, depression, embarrassment, outrage, bravado, ennui. I do not recall any amusement. One woman who had an appointment uptown she “really had to get to” became extremely self-righteous. After ten or twenty minutes of listening to her kvetching and moaning, a couple of us flexed the bars and let her slip out, to Kate’s apparent annoyance (we weren’t playing by the rules).

I have no idea how long this event went on, but at some point I was seized by an urge to revolt within the context of the piece. The top two-by-four was within six or seven inches of the ceiling. I eyed it, took a deep breath, and began to climb. Somehow, I shinnied up the bars, probably with the help of many hands, though all I remember is the seizure of will that carried me up and through the tight squeeze at the top, over, and down. I experienced an incredible exhilaration, a triumphal “No” to our unceremonious caging. I don’t remember whether the others stayed inside or whether I just left. It was a powerful event.

This was the first occasion at Judson at which I felt seized by the energy of the matter at hand, and it took me very much by surprise.

Figure 43. Bici Hendricks, *DETERIORATIONS*. program October 6, 1967. ink, photocopy on orange paper. collection of the author (Nye Ffarrabas)

Local Art

Maurice Blanc

. . . Amazements

Several weeks ago I spoke of the notion of Manhattan as a labyrinth. Starting with this column, I would like to consider the oases and kinetic fields of the tremendous maze, hence the above heading "Amazements." I shall try to cover multi-media events and also try to tell about the discoveries of the unusual or craftsmanlike that I come across in my journeys in the labyrinth.

Thursday, Friday and Saturday of last week I went to the Judson Gallery at 239 Thompson St., each time finding a totally transformed room. The space, not more than 200 sq. ft., was rearranged each time by artist-poets (who might better be labelled illuminators) in a series called, *12 Evenings of Manipulations*, sponsored by Judson Church and organized by John Hendricks. So far I know that my sense awareness has been revitalized by the series; later, I found myself *really* seeing a group of kids hitting the sidewalk with iron poles, making sparks, whereas I probably would have been oblivious of this natural theatrical event ordinarily.

Bici Hendrick's event, called "Deteriorations" subtitled (*Meltings*), had a quiet sensuality. Sawdust on the floor and unpolished pebbles on low display areas received the gravity of solid ice; candles encased in ice molds flickered and reflected in the larger formless ice boulders which were also lit by gentle red overhead lights. Epigrammatic poems or artless affirmations of prosaic reality interspersed with blue-white Canadian landscape shots appeared on one wall projected from a continuous cycle slide machine. A small electronic advertising belt with golden letters sent forth similar messages: short poems of simplicity, during the whole event. Some of us used the scattered tools: tongs, light hammers, screwdrivers, ice picks to assist in the melting process. We either penetrated the great ice blocks, (watching the internal shattering or the unpredictable path of the faults) or chipped away at the blocks making rough surfaces. Some transformed the ice without violence by using the bodily heat of their hands in the manner of molding.

Mrs. Hendricks was adamant that the audience participation *not* be thought of as therapy. Somehow her purpose in the event and our participation had something of the cry for a premature Spring, rebirth, about it. How else explain her statement that her initial inspiration for the event was the notion of "defrosting the American flag"?

Figure 44. (above) Grateful acknowledgment to The Villager and NYC Community Media is made for permission to excerpt from the Maurice Blanc article, "Amazements", *The Villager* ('Local Art') (October 12, 1967).

Figure 45 (right). Three Complementary Concepts contributed to Fantastic Architecture. typed photocopy.

Grateful acknowledgment is made to Something Else Press for permission to quote from Bici's contribution to *Fantastic Architecture*.

FANTASTIC ARCHITECTURE

Bici Hendricks 1967

THREE COMPLEMENTARY CONCEPTS

The Life-Stone -- a sepulchre-like pit with trap door, one space per person, marked by a simple headstone...

The Bruder -- a shallow, conical hover on a central post, with overhead radiant heat and indirect lighting sources in radial ceiling gills, and a platform floor...

The Hologram House -- walls, roof, and floor projected in three dimensions to define a living or working space...

The Life-Stone is the logical outcome of the pressure of expanding population, diminishing apartment sizes, the high cost of labor and materials, the tendency to conformity and standardization, the intensifying struggle to maintain personal privacy and ownership rights, and the phenomenon of the fallout shelter. It is the basic dwelling; a triumph of individualism. Although the chamber is invariably unfurnished and unadorned, some slight variation in headstone markers is anticipated to satisfy idiosyncratic differences, and status cravings will be pacified through a system of preferential locations.

Precast concrete. Stone.

The Bruder, however, reflects another aspect of our polarizing society: the need for an unrestricted and wholly communal open area which can be both meeting place and living quarters--a fluid concept that will be accentuated as leisure time increases and the artificial barriers between working and playing fall away. Like the Life-Stone, the Bruder is without furniture or adornment, but it is also without walls or confinement of any kind, and hence without privacy, all aspects of life and social behavior taking place in full view. Here the de-emphasis of personal property is total, the confinement of the family unit is dissolved, and state surveillance, while facilitated, actually becomes unnecessary in the prevailing climate of free and joyous brotherhood and cooperation toward shared goals.

Cone, molded plastic on a reinforced concrete pole.
Platform resilient plastic.

Both these are urban concepts. Each, in its way, contributes to the anonymity so preciously regarded in the city. Hologram houses might be used either as office space (a further urban application) or as country retreats from city attrition. Two great characteristics of today's culture are the strength of appeal of the visual (seeing is believing), and the appetite for novelty (so what else is new). This house, which consists entirely of filmed, projected light, achieved reality and depth only by means of the optical sense. Purely illusory, it is capable of transformation as frequently as the owner desires to expose a new image to replace the old, whereas moving day may be accomplished by means of a goat pocket or a stamped envelope. Here is full scope for man's urge to elaborate and vary his surroundings. No detail of elegance or comfort need be spared.

Laser light.

Fluxus Paper Concert

November 15, 1967

I took part in the Fluxus Paper Concert at - I think it was - the Hallmark Auditorium. This was a proper Fluxus event. It was meticulously scripted by George, with input by those of us who were to take part.

There was a huge sheet of stiff, white paper across the front of the proscenium, hiding the stage area where we were. Upon this we operated in various ways. One of the Japanese artists, I believe it was Yoshi Wada (or maybe Arakawa?) stood above and behind the audience who were facing the white paper. He was dressed as a Samurai warrior and had a bow and a quiver of arrows, which he loosed, Zen archery style, one by one, to fly over the heads of the audience, pierce the paper, and vanish onto the stage proper, where we were waiting (off to the side, out of range).

There was a record player playing the Fluxus theme song - Hank (Williams?) singing something about a train coming with a whistle that rattled and screamed. It was a piece George loved, and I was to pick up the arm and set it back at the beginning when it got to a certain place, over and over again. While this played, different artists did various things involving the holes, from behind the paper curtain, such as squirt ink through them, toward the audience, and my part was to have the lights turned off and take a penlight flashlight, and poke it through the holes, one after the other in a random pattern.

It was fun and striking, and splendidly entertaining, but quite devoid of narrative, symbolism, or any discernable "meaning." It was, rather, a celebration - in this case, of paper.

I am thinking, as I look back on it, that there was a certain bathos, or deliberate and good-natured pointlessness to much of the performance work:

A french horn player strides out onto an empty stage, puts his lips to the mouthpiece, and tilts the horn so that the bell spills a load of marbles that had been hidden therein.

A row of performers wearing hats stands silently while a text is read aloud. Each performer has a certain word to react to, and does so by lifting and re-seating his/her hat, repeating the gesture as often as the word recurs in the text, so that hats are popping on and off - again in a random pattern - all up and down the row of deadpan performers. This piece is a salute to Andreas Olivetti, of typewriter fame.

A lone performer comes out on stage and creates a diversion by pouring water elaborately, from one container to another.

And as to the pointlessness, above-mentioned, its very pointlessness points to the vapidness in the culture in which we found (and find) ourselves, and so it is social comment of a very pointed nature.

Fluxus Paper Concert

Instructions, page 1 of 2

Figure 46. 2 pages. typed photocopy.

PAPER CONCERT BY THE FLUXMASTERS OF THE REAR-GARDE

for the opening night of the paper show at the museum of contemporary crafts
Time & Life building, Nov.15th, 10PM

Collective compositions by: Ayo, Dan Lauffer, George Maciunas, Chieko Shiomi,
Ben Patterson, Ben Vautier, Bob Watts, Ken Jacobs, Bici & Geoff Hendricks.

PART I, In memoriam to Adriano Olivetti for paper orchestra

Orchestra of 10 performers is seated on stage in front of a metronome. The members wear paper suits painted black, with shirt front area and gloves painted in day-glo white. Papers used by performers are painted in various day-glo colors. The orchestra is illuminated with day-glo (black) lights only. The metronome is equipped with contact microphone and its swinging pendulum is painted in day-glo white. The orchestra follows a score of used Olivetti adding machine paper roll, their chosen number indicating the cue for their performance which is done sharply and in time with the metronome beat.

- 1st performer rips various papers*
 - 2nd performer crumples and crushes various papers
 - 3rd performer hits or taps stretched paper*
 - 4th performer blows out confetti through a paper tube
 - 5th performer turns pages of a book*
 - 6th performer flips edge of a deck of cards*
 - 7th performer explodes an inflated paper bag
 - 8th performer throws paper gliders to the audience
 - 9th performer burns flash type paper
 - 10th performer drops a paper cup to the floor
- * indicates contact microphone attached to the paper

PART II, Kill paper not people

A large paper curtain separates the audience from the stage. 6 contact microphones are attached to the surface of the paper and various backings. Throughout the performance the paper curtain is pushed in and out at the rate of a heart beat by a performer not seen by the audience.

1. Various performers are concealed in large horizontal boxes serving as seats for the public. They make their exit by cutting out an opening in the sides of the boxes through which to exit.
2. Performer in samurai suit of armor, equipped with long sword and bow exits from a large vertical paper box, positions himself among the audience and shoots 7 arrows, one minute apart, to the paper curtain. Each time the arrow hits a different spot on the curtain prepared in advance with different backings.
 - a) 1st arrow hits the curtain backed by a gong or sheet metal, the gong is immediately removed by performers behind the curtain, who then apply blue or black paint spray starting from the arrow hole in spiral fashion until a circle of about 4ft is reached.
 - b) 2nd arrow hits the curtain backed by balloon, and a spray of red confetti is blown through the hole over the audience by means of a blower.
 - c) 3rd arrow penetrates the curtain without making a sound, and a large fan behind the curtain is turned on to blow wind toward the curtain causing its surface to wave or ripple.
 - d) 4th arrow hits the curtain and shaving cream is released through the hole oozing out and dripping down the paper curtain.
 - e) 5th arrow hits the curtain backed by heavy cardboard. A performer in white suit covered with pressure sensitive adhesive walks out in front of the curtain and pulls the arrow out. As he does that a cascade of red confetti is released through the arrow hole drenching the performer with red confetti (held by the adhesive).
 - f) 6th arrow penetrates the curtain and auditorium lights are shut off
 - g) 7th arrow hits the curtain backed by heavy cardboard, when it is pulled out by performer on the audience side of the curtain, water is squirted

Fluxus Paper Concert

Instructions, page 2 of 2

Figure 45, page 2.

painted in day-glo white. Papers used by performers are painted in various day-glo colors. The orchestra is illuminated with day-glo (black) lights only. The metronome is equipped with contact microphone and its swinging pendulum is painted in day-glo white. The orchestra follows a score of used Olivetti adding machine paper roll, their chosen number indicating the cue for their performance which is done sharply and in time with the metronome beat.

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 - d) 4th arrow hits the curtain and shaving cream is released through the hole oozing out and dripping down the paper curtain.
 - e) 5th arrow hits the curtain backed by heavy cardboard. A performer in white suit covered with pressure sensitive adhesive walks out in front of the curtain and pulls the arrow out. As he does that a cascade of red confetti is released through the arrow hole drenching the performer with red confetti (held by the adhesive).
 - f) 6th arrow penetrates the curtain and auditorium lights are shut off
 - g) 7th arrow hits the curtain backed by heavy cardboard, when it is pulled out by performer on the audience side of the curtain, water is squirted toward the audience through the arrow hole.
 - h) 8th arrow penetrates the curtain and a bright light is shone at audience from behind the curtain through the arrow hole.
 - f) last arrows penetrate the curtain, and each time various paper shapes (thin ribbons, gliders, rolls, etc) are thrown in clusters from behind the curtain, over it and toward the audience.
3. The arrow shooting warrior now comes towards the curtain and with sword commences to cut the curtain at the foot throughout its entire width. As the opening is made, a large space frame the width of the curtain, made from paper tube tetrahedra, is pushed toward the audience, until the entire audience is covered with the space frame lowered over their heads. Half of the performers construct the space frame behind the curtain as it is being pushed over the audience and the other half (originally concealed in boxes) sit among the audience helping the space frame move over the heads of the audience.

XERO
COPY

XERO
COPY

XERO
COPY

QUESTIONS

28 February 1968

--Bici Hendricks

MULTIPLE CHOICE

1. HOW DOES YOUR GARDEN GROW?
 - a) All in a row
 - b) Very well, thank you
 - c) By photosynthesis
 - d) By magic
2. ART IS:
 - a) A conjuring trick
 - b) Prayer
 - c) Reality
 - d) A poem should not mean, but be
3. REALITY IS:
 - a) A conjuring trick
 - b) The truth
 - c) Not ascertainable, as the senses necessarily distort our perceptions
 - d) A crutch
4. ART IS:
 - a) The icing on the cultural cake, pretty, but unnecessary
 - b) The crowning achievement of man's endeavors
 - c) A shorthand language by whose means the aware hope to communicate with the unawakened
 - d) Self-expression
5. WHAT MAKES YOU THINK THERE OUGHT TO BE FIVE QUESTIONS?
 - a) There should be, but there aren't
 - b) Five is arbitrary; four is just as good
 - c) This is a question
 - d) This is not a question, it is a philosophical statement on the nature of expectation

TRUE/FALSE

1. () Search is discovery
2. () Change is the constant
3. () Prayer is commitment
4. () A whole is a part is a whole
5. () Every act of poetry is an act of politics

6. () Any canon of good taste can only follow, not dictate, authentic art
7. () New problems demand new forms
8. () Artists are the antennae of the race
9. () No subject matter is offensive, only the treatment may offend
10. () A part-time artist is a contradiction in terms

ESSAY

Construct a truly original word pair such that you could still be finding new dimensions in it after thinking about it for one year.

REPORT CARD

Cause: Talking.... Smoking.... Cheating....
Hostile Attitude.... Lateness.... Sexuality....
Inability to Follow Directions.... Color of
Skin.... Political Affiliations.... I.Q....
Nasty Habits.... Appearance.... Failure to
Live Up to Fine Potentialities.... Other....

Destruction In Art Symposium (D.I.A.S.)

Spring 1968: Judson Gallery and Finch College Museum

The Destruction in Art Symposium (DIAS) was a broad-based and truly international venture. A large number of artists participated in the events, which took place at Judson, Finch College Museum, and elsewhere. Its main event at Judson, in the spring of 1968, was a sprawling group exhibition in the gallery and the garden, with the symposium convened in the Garden room after a series of performances outside.

At the far end of the garden, against the brick wall, was my piece, a shrine made out of a monolith of ice and paved with at least twelve dozen large white eggs, with flagstones radiating out to the surrounding space. Candles and mirrors were interspersed among these, and again there were icepicks—an element I considered foreign to my contemplative feeling about the piece, in which the “destruction” would be accomplished without human agency at the natural pace of melting ice. Nevertheless, I capitulated to the action orientation of the day, and I also provided the flagstones as steps by which one might make one’s way among the eggs, up to the ice block to chop at it. (Some people also got into smashing the eggs, and the stench in the garden lasted for weeks.)

At the other end of the garden, Ralph Ortiz was preparing to kill two chickens (The Sad End of Henny Penny, or something like that). One of the hens was black and one was white. .Amidst much squawking and flapping, they were hung by their feet from two tall ailanthus trees and their throats were cut.

There was great commotion about this ritual (?) slaughter, and voices rose to loud, angry, and righteous heights. It was “art,” it was “race politics,” it was “senseless brutality,” it was “freedom of speech,” it was “wanton,” “sadistic,” “over the line,” et cetera. My focus was at the other end of the courtyard, and I was glad of the opportunity to refrain from getting involved. Having worked on a farm and plucked chickens many times, I was not horrified by the killing, but there was a jagged and polarized energy to the whole thing that haunted me. This piece was followed by an action of Hermann Nitsch, involving a sacrificial lamb that had been professionally and humanely killed prior to the event. Nitsch dragged the flayed carcass up and down the yard on a rope. I stood watching, with an icepick in my hand, since nobody was “doing” ice at that point. I found myself seized by pity for the lifeless animal. It was perfectly clear that the body was in no pain, yet there was an aura of implied suffering around it that galvanized me. Stepping forward, I leaned over the carcass and plunged the ice pick into its rib cage several times with all my might as if to still the heart. The moment soon over, I withdrew, shaken.

In the symposium that followed people asked me what the stabbing was all about. I said it was about pity for the lamb and wanting to do the merciful thing and end its misery. This did not make sense to people who wanted my action to have been about rage, vengeance, stompin’, stormin’ macho stuff: a political statement.

The symposium was filled with controversy, rhetoric, politics, and theatrical grandstanding. There must have been 150 of us crammed into the Garden Room. Charlotte Moorman performed Nam June Paik’s One for Violin, raising a violin slowly, slowly, high over her head, and bringing it down with full force to smash on the table. Just as she completed her excruciating five-minute swing, Saul Gottlieb jumped up, shouting that this was shameful and wasteful, depriving some hypothetical kid on the Lower East Side of music lessons, and so on. He charged at Charlotte to grab her arm and prevent the smashing, but she had already reached the apex and was starting the descent like some overcoiled spring. There was no way she could stop as Gottlieb’s head was suddenly thrust into the path of the fiddle. Down the violin came, creas-

ing his forehead with a pretty nasty gash before it hit the table and exploded into splinters. People thought that Charlotte had gone for him deliberately, but that was not the case. It certainly fed the chaotic energy in the room, though.

I don't remember much of what was said during the rest of the symposium, but I do remember the passion of the arguments, the sarcasm of the rejoinders. When my turn came, I read my statement. At this distance, it seems thin and inadequate. I was trying to confront the kind of knee-jerk sentimentalism that many rosewater liberals use to object to art works and actions that push boundaries, the very attitude that turns explorations into commodities, discoveries into collector's items (from which the dealers, not the artists, reap the profits), and that inexorably trades in the authentic, radical insight for the comfortable anaesthetic. Today, I would say that in art everything depends on transmutation of the object, the moment, the phrase, even if infinitesimally slightly, so that new meaning emerges.

Surprise, double-entendre, even shock, and certainly humor are effective transformative means, but what was manifestly missing in a lot of this very in-your-face work was a basic humanity, or patience, the artistry to take it to the next step. Some of the art, and the criticism that accompanied it, was such shrill, scornful, antisensibility polemical overkill that it tended to preempt attention like a five-year-old's tantrum: interesting, perhaps, but scarcely edifying. Here's a condensed version of what I said at the symposium:

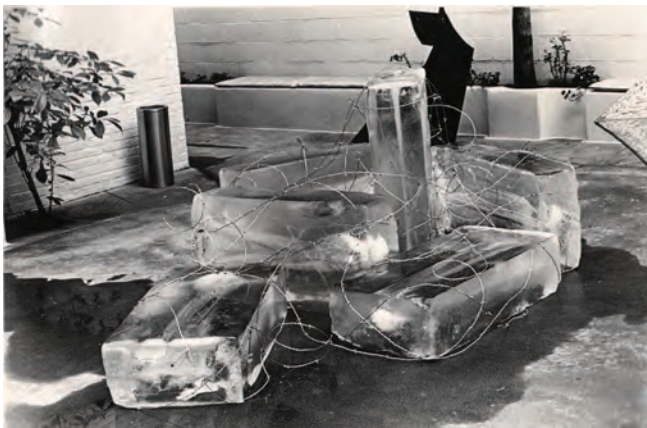


Figure 48. *Untitled*. ice and barbed wire installation at the Finch College Museum Destruction in Art show, 1968 See also page 53 for a larger illustration. Photo: Julie Abeles.

Although my own work involves nonviolent destruction, I'd like to say a few words to answer the objections to these strong methods and materials. Few areas of imagery could be more appropriate at this moment in history. Art has no obligation to be pretty. It does have an obligation to be relevant in its time. Art is educative in function, but not didactic in method. Art appeals to us through the intellect, but even more through our emotions [*and our senses!*]. Intellect may have carried us nearly to the stars, but emotionally we are still very close to the Aurignacian cave-temples of 20,000 years ago. In a culture so characterized by violence and bloodshed, this imagery is legitimate in art. This imagery should be tolerated for the sobering and civilizing insights it can offer.

My participation in Judson Gallery events was part of *living at the edge*, which was clearly happening in my life. Geoff and I were in the thick of a very yeasty soup - the art world in New York at that time. We were both experiencing huge creative upswings. I loved my children dearly and had an intense connection to them, but in this maelstrom I scarcely broke stride for childbirth. I kept going. In addition to the events detailed here, I was involved in perhaps a half dozen other shows and performances that year. I was stretching and growing convulsively, and emotionally I was close to my limit. Much of the real and implied violence and other raw weirdness in other people's work troubled me profoundly. I could not continue to nurture my children or myself in the midst of so much "danger music." I felt it as a rising tide in the real world, too: overwhelming, menacing, psychotic. This was no mere projection of my inner state on outward events. It was, I think, a very accurate perception of the world. Remember the year was 1968. My unease was reality-based and prophetic.

Terminal Readings - part of *Page Process*, 1969-1971



There was one further occasion in Judson gallery, probably in 1969, in which I participated. It was *Terminal Reading*, the first of three readings of an unfinished novel of mine (I had three copies). The second was performed at the Arts Lab in London, in the fall of 1970, and the third was at the Billy Apple Gallery on 23rd Street, in the spring of 1971. Photographer unknown.

Four performers are seated in the center of the space, like a string quartet with music stands in front of them. (These may be preselected readers or they may arise spontaneously from the audience.) On each stand is one-fourth of the manuscript, loose-leaf in black folders. In the middle of the square formed by the music stands is a hibachi or other small, contained fire. The audience sits or stand around the perimeter and may approach, withdraw, circulate, or simply listen.

Performers begin to read, first one at a time, then one voice over another, fast, slowly, loud, soft, repeating passages at will, holding silence, sometimes all four speaking at once, sometimes none. As performers are finished with a page, they may crumple the page and throw it in the fire, or they may pass it on, or another may reach over and start reading it. Thus, all manner of musical structures -

theme, counterstatement, development, recapitulation, solo, duet, stretto, fugue, and so forth - are spontaneously produced from the written word on the page.

This process continues until all the pages are read and finally consumed. At Judson Gallery, the performers were Geoffrey Hendricks, Ronald Gross, myself, and one other person whose face and name elude me after thirty years. It was difficult but very cleansing to rid myself in this way of a piece of writing that never would finish itself, and the resulting "piece" was remarkably strong and beautiful, irrespective of the quality of the manuscript and different each time with other readers. This was one of my favorite art works.

In the 1971 at Billy Apple Gallery I had a show which I titled *Page Process*. In that show, I purged many files and storage boxes of all manner of written work: geometry notes, love letters, old bank records, grocery lists ... you name it. These were thumbtacked to the walls for anyone to remove and read, and, when read, to be torn in pieces, crumpled on the floor, or replaced upon the wall, whichever suited the mood of the participant/observer.

The culmination of the show was the third of my three Terminal Reading events, intended to rid myself of the manuscript of a novel I was unable and unready to finish by any other means. Since the gallery could not allow a fire, the end result was five or six enormous clear plastic bags of paper detritus put out in the street for the dawn trash collection; a great party; and a grand catharsis.

The inspiration for this, and several other performances, was the idea of the Native American potlatch, coupled with the urge to divest triumphantly, and to experience the tug to the heartstrings that can accompany a letting go of things to which one feels a real attachment.



Figure 49. (facing page, left) The Arts Lab, London, 1970. Performers: Geoff Hendricks and Bici Hendricks. Photographer unknown.

Figure 50. (above) Terminal Reading performance, Billy Apple Gallery, New York City, 1971. Performers: Geoff Hendricks, Iris Lezak, Das Anudas, and Bici. Seated on floor: Joe Jones. Half out of picture: Phyllis Birkby. Photographer unknown.

Code Poems

C —•—•
 A •—
 L •—••
 L •—••
 M ——
 E •
 I ••
 S •••
 H ••••
 M ——
 A •—
 E •
 L •—••

when you think it
 it's done
 the whalermen
 my ancestors
 old salts
 put
 lightly
 in to the
 titilating
 islands
 ahoy
 there
 my whalermen

1976

M ——
 O ———
 N —•
 O ———
 C —•—•
 O ———
 T —
 Y —•—
 L •—••
 E •
 D —••
 O ———
 N —•

I have
 not seen things
 sprouting
 not seen things
 thrusting, thriving
 not seen things
 grow
 popping right up
 in front of me
 to
 dance in the
 sun like this
 ever!

1976

G ——•
 U ••—
 A •—
 R •—•
 D —••
 I ••
 A •—
 N —•
 A •—
 N —•
 G ——•
 E •
 L •—••

You've lingered
 With me all
 These years ~
 My tender
 Nemesis?
 Or my
 Perverse
 Mentor?
 You've plucked
 Me from
 Harm oft-times
 For
 What purposes?

2001

Last Days with George Maciunas, 1978

Reprinted with permission of Hansjörg Mayer from *Mr. Fluxus: A Collective Portrait of George Maciunas 1931-1978*, Emmett Williams, Ann Noel, and Ay-O, Editors. (London: Hansjörg Mayer: May 1998), pages 304-307.

He is at University Hospital. I go to visit him. He is in bed; eyes closed. He opens his eyes and sees me sitting in a chair at the foot of his bed, smiles weakly. Hello.

I hardly recognize him. His skin is parchment yellow, his hair needs cutting and sticks out, straight and fine and black in all directions. His one good eye ... but I can't remember: glasses? black patch? ... or just George.

He fades in and out of some reminiscences of sailing up the coast with a crew of artists, and putting in at Hadley Harbor - "*The most beautiful place of all*" - and how he had not known, at the time, that that place was connected with me. I flash, irritably, on the thought that nobody ever knows these things about me; without taking responsibility for how this might come about, how elaborately I camouflage myself, or how deeply I hide.

In the absence of a clear imperative, I wait. Which proves to be the best thing I could have done. I resolve simply to be there, as often as I can, for as long as it seems useful. We were, after all, not intimate; I do not want to add intrusion to his list of woes.

I perceive George as a very courteous, private person. I am grateful, as he prattles along, entertaining me, trying to help me feel at ease. George is not my first friend to die, but he is the first I have watched *in process*. I am impressed by everything - by the final, end-game, inevitable reality of it. This is the *last reel*, and I am here, watching the action wind down. I am also struck by how close he is to my age.

I visit George every day, mostly to sit and witness, to do small chores, mainly in getting the attention of the busy staff when he needs something. I haven't the faintest whether my visits are appreciated or a burden to him. I don't know how to ask. I just keep coming. I feel that I ought to be doing something differently, with more 'style.' After all, George made every event in his life into an art work of the absurd. It was his hallmark as an artist. By contrast, I feel very plain. I bring him a pot of orange marigolds. I want them to last, so I don't buy cut flowers. But last ... how long? No one knows. I set them on the window sill, hoping he can see them without straining.

One afternoon, he asks me to help him walk to the john. His arms and torso are so withered up that I feel I can handle whatever might arise. I help him swing his legs over and down, noticing how swollen they are, filled with fluid, discolored, and the skin seeming as though it would burst if handled roughly. As he got his feet under him and I helped him up, it was like an intellectual exercise - mind over matter. He seemed to have lost direction and contact with the floor. Together, we staggered a step or two, and then George sagged and fell, the weight of his tree trunk legs pulling him down. I could not counter the fluid dead-weight of his legs. All I could do was buffer the fall, guide his descent, and prop him up while I went to get an orderly, someone strong enough to wrestle him back to bed and give him his pee-bottle while I wait outside feeling scared and foolish and wondering if I was to blame. George looked drained and exhausted, grey with pain.

Another day, a doctor comes in to talk with him. I catch him for a few minutes in the hall afterward. I ask about George's legs, what makes them that way. ... Something about protein metabolism and cell walls breaking down. That means we are near the end. What makes the pain so bad, I ask him; why is cancer so specially bad? He tells me that the cancer cells invade the nerve fibers themselves, so that the circuits are just 'on' all the time, one continuous DC pain signal, without relief. Oh. Now I see. Godde.

Another day, I come in and George is not in his room. My stomach falls. A nurse comes by and I grab her and ask. ... No, he's moved across the hall. He's being X-rayed with a mobile unit - pushed upright, shoved around. He is in terrible pain,

crying out as they position him for the different views they want. Again, I wait outside, hurting for him. Afterward, his face is grey again, his jaw set, angry. What do they have to do that for? Not to help him; they can't help him. Nothing can. Why don't they let him be? He lets me know that's what he's feeling too.

Emmett [Williams] has come in again. Got George into a wheelchair, and made up some silly kids' game, wheeling him around. Of course! Why don't I think of those things? It was such a simple kindness, playing like kids. George is eating something, picking at a dessert from his meal tray. He offers me some from his dish with his spoon. Canned peaches. I've just eaten. I say no thanks. Then it comes to me that people probably act as though cancer was catching, a lot. I've fallen into an appearance of that, unawares. I must redeem myself. We visit for a while. Then I say I've changed my mind, I would like the peaches now. I eat them, feeling self-conscious. I get up to go. I'll be back tomorrow afternoon, around one. Just for good measure, I kiss George on the cheek, so he'll be sure to know I don't think he's disgusting or contagious. I look back, from the door. There's a faint little smile on George's face. He lifts one hand, from the elbow. He wiggles his fingers, waving. He knows something I don't know, yet.

Next day, I realize I've set up a social meeting with a client and another therapist. Can't change it. Can't get to the hospital by one. Phone the nurse, be sure he gets the message that I'll be there by four. At three o'clock, I stop home for some reason, on the way to the hospital. I'm coming up the stairs. The phone rings. My daughter answers it. She screams, comes flying down the stairs, sobbing, into my arms. George is dead! Tyche clings to me. She is twelve. I didn't know she cared so much. Young Bracken joins us. We hold each other in the stairwell till we are calmer. Then I go upstairs to telephone Emmett and tell him the news.

It's the only time I ever know Emmett to be nonplussed: *Well!* he splutters. *Now* what to do? I'm feeling that way, too. Something must be *done*, for decency's sake. But there's nothing to do. We decide to meet after supper, and go to the house of some friends of his. He proceeds to get drunk and recite his own poems. I'm driving, so I don't even get loaded. Just angry. I hurl my poems back at him. This wasn't how I thought it would be. Actually, I hadn't thought ahead, at all. I just feel empty.

The following day, I go in to talk to the hospital staff. I thank them for their kindness to George. The marigolds are still on the window sill. I take them with me. The mattress is folded over on itself. They're hoeing out his stall. He is gone, I can see that now. It's over.

I go and meet his niece, for lunch. Tuna fish sandwiches. I punctuate my life on important occasions, it seems, with tuna salad on whole wheat. [Remember Geoff bringing tuna sandwiches right after my children were born ... Flash on pix of George eating Alison's *Identical Lunch*. ... We talk about George. She is kind, but I'm sure she wonders who I am. Just somebody who knew him.

On the way home, I pass a hospital supply place and go in, on impulse. There is an enamel enema container hanging in the window. Very pure and white. I buy it, and some press type, on the way home. At home, I stick a quotation from Rilke across the front of the white enamel can, very stark, pure, elegant, and ridiculous in press type, one of George's favorite media:

**DU MUSST DAS LEBEN NICHT VERSTEHEN
DANN WIRD ES WERDEN WIE EIN FEST**

[You must not understand life, then it will be like a festival.]

I am finished, finally. ... George would have approved.

Words of One Syllable, 1983

Figure 52. 3-page manuscript of *Words of One Syllable*

When I hung up the phone her words came down on me. I put my hands to my head and thought, "No help for it! No help!" My heart raced like an air drill. Sun slid in shrill slant squares down the white wall. The plants in their pots on the ledge looked like hard green lace. They could drink sun and be still. Out of it. Not a part of my world spun with thoughts of what she had said: "We'll think back to this as the year we should have got out. Two years from now will come the coup."

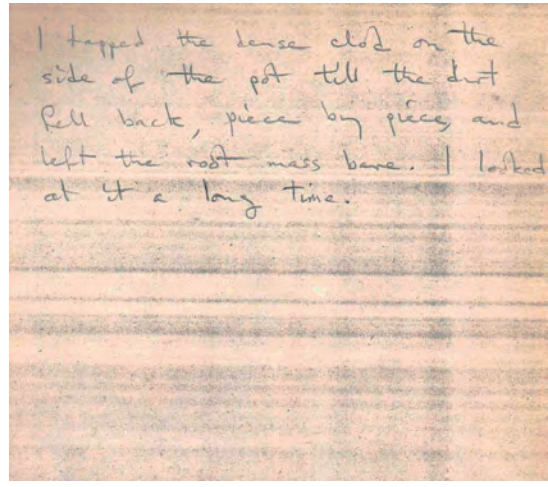
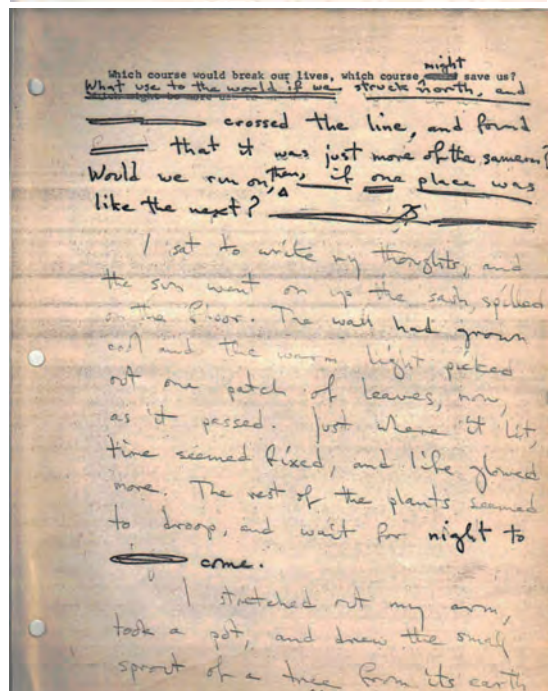
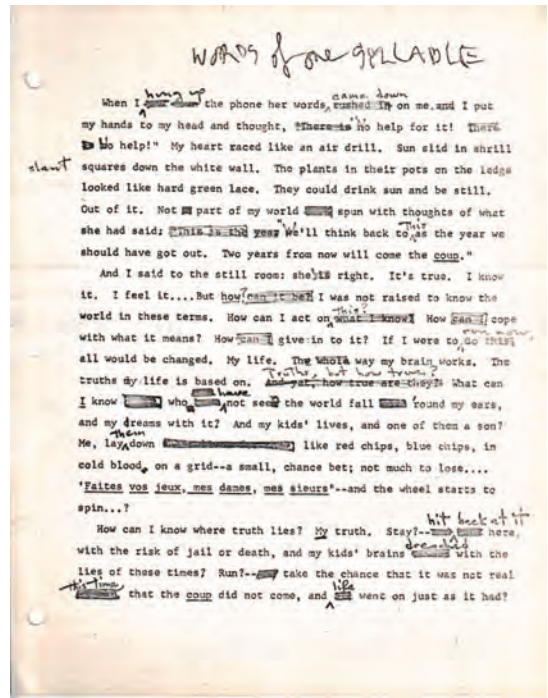
And I said to the still room: She's right. It's true. I know it. I feel it. ... But how? I was not raised to know the world in these terms. How can I act on this? How can I cope with what it means? How can I give in to it? If I were to run now, all would be changed. My life. The way my brain works. The truths my life is based on. Truths, but how true? What can I know who have not seen the world fall 'round my ears, and my dreams with it? And my kids' lives, and one of them a son? Me, lay them down like red chips, blue chips, in cold blood on a grid - a small, chance, bet; not much to lose. ... 'Faites vos jeux, mes dames, mes sieurs' - and the wheel starts to spin ...?

How can I know where truth lies? My truth. Stay? Hit back at it with the risk of jail or death, and my kids' brains drenched with the lies of these times? Run? - take the chance that it was not real this time, that the coup did not come, and life went on just as it had?

Which course would break our lives, which course might save us? What use to the world if we struck north, and crossed the line, and found that it was just more of the same? Would we run on then, if one place was like the next?

I sat to write my thoughts, and the sun went on up the sash, spilled on to the floor. The wall had grown cool and the warm light picked out one patch of leaves, now, as it passed. Just where it lit, time seemed fixed, and life glowed more. The rest of the plants seemed to droop, and wait for night to come.

I stretched out my arm, took a pot, and drew the small sprout of a tree from its earth. I tapped the dense clod on the side of the pot till the dirt fell back, piece by piece, and left the root mass bare. I looked at it a long time.



Sometime, many years ago, I became aware of a small human figurine carved in limestone showing traces of red ochre. She was discovered in a archaeological dig in lower Austria, in 1908. Little is known about her: who or what she represents, why she was carved from stone not native to the area where she was found, whether she was considered as a representation of the Great Mother Goddess of ancient times, a maternal role model on the natural, human level, a child's toy, or a mortuary figurine (viz. the powdered red ochre that remains upon her body). Even the age of the carving is in dispute, ranging from 22,000 to nearly 30,000 years ago; for limestone, yielding nothing to Carbon-14 rating procedures, tells no tales.



Figure 53. Drawing of the Willendorf figurine and two unrelated drawings called "Tree Man" from Nye's notebooks, dated March 11, 1983.

One day, during the time I was in New York City doing AIDS work with an agency that did personal growth workshops with PWAs and their partners, families, and caregivers, I was also attending a leadership training program unrelated to my work. We were stretched in many directions, with homework on the weekends, and on one particular weekend we were told to do a lot of hours on some special project which we were required to finish in the allotted time and to report on the experience at the next meeting. Nothing daunted, I chose to "become" the person (or goddess) of that terrifying - and fascinating - figurine!

Well, I recruited another woman from the leadership group to be my camera person. I went to all the drugstores in the vicinity and bought all the mudpacks I could find. We rendezvoused at my apartment (a room in the Quaker boarding house where I was staying, and I stripped nude and we plastered me all over - front (and back I think) - and pulled a little wool cap down over

my face. Okay. But the room was too small! How to get enough distance to get the full effect? It was a co-ed house, so the hall was not an option. The bathroom was too small, and gave the wrong ambiance. Hmm. Aha! The roof! Swathed in a sheet or towel, or whatever, I went with my photographer up and out onto that hot, crunchy tarpaper in my bare feet. We found a slightly sequestered nook, and hastily shot the pictures that we needed ... and bolted down to my room again, and the shower to get as much mud off as possible!

When my photographer friend showed up at the next meeting with the photographs, I was astounded: I had indeed, for that moment in time, become the Goddess (as I imagined her to be)! It didn't make a huge impression on the group, most of whom were half my age, or younger, and possibly grossed out by the whole thing. But it was transformative for me. It was the beginning of a long, slow shift in my feelings about my physical self, the beginning of the end of a lifelong war with mirrors, the start of a gentle, but genuine, rapprochement between my caustic, judging mind, imbued, as it was, by the pitiless images of youth-and-beauty purveyed at every hand by magazines and all the rest of the media and by the culture in general, and my imperfect, inevitably aging, overweight, and terribly vulnerable body.

That was in 1991, and the conversation continues. By this time, with more physical deficits to be dealt with, it's usually my attempt to explain to this or that physical therapist who doesn't 'get' why I can't understand her instructions, or don't always do them ... the simple fact that "I don't have a body." ("Why, of course you do! Just step in front of the mirror there, and take a look.") But it does little good to try to reason with a mind that has spent so many decades convulsively, frantically, out of touch with that thing that is called a body! The best thing that I did was take those pictures and - with ultimate, consummate compassion - become able not only to share them with the group, but to look at them, myself. And realize that there is historical precedent for the body that I have, and that - to some eyes, somewhere - there is a kind of beauty there.

from the *Ascutneiad*

1982-1984

Inside Mount Ascutney
is a lake of compassion.
Inside me
is Mount Ascutney.

1981-1982

Clutch (Psyku)

Inside me, right now, it's
like petrified dinosaur eggs
trying to hatch
1983



Figure 54. *Pea Vine*. 1982.
from the *Ascutneiad* notebook
Photo: Adam Silver



Figure 55. *Ascutney*. pastel. 1982 from the *Ascutneiad* notebook
Photo: Adam Silver

Forgiveness

13 April

I did not write yesterday, April twelfth,
the first day of the training intensive,
and I forgive myself.

I have not written today, the 13th of April,
the second day of the training intensive,
and I forgive myself. Today I kept thinking,
Once upon a time . . . Once upon a time . . .

17 April

I did not write on Saturday, Sunday, or Monday,
at the training intensive, and I forgive (I was
going to say 'forget') myself.

One day, I did not spend my two hours writing:
that was a twenty-two hour day.
The next day, I did not write: a twenty-hour day.
The third day: eighteen hours. The fourth: sixteen,
and so on. Each day shorter than the one before ~
shortening my life . . .

Ahem! sez Reality

1984



‘Etruscan Chariot - Child’s Toy’

Figure 56. rusted metal on terracotta tile;
provenance, a garden in Brattleboro, VT.

Although the Etruscans voyaged east to many Greek sites and their art was highly developed, evincing a strong interest in chariots, until now no evidence has existed to indicate a long voyage westward to the New World. To have unearthed such a treasure during a spring dig in a vegetable garden is rare good fortune indeed. Its origins might even be traced to the earlier Villanovan civilization (900-500 BCE) which preceded the Etruscan settlement of central Italy.



‘Coprolite: (Very Young Dinosaur Scat)’

Figure 57. provenance, river bank, West River, Dummerston, VT.

A specimen from Flux Paleontology, this, and the *Ceremonial Transfer*, are explicitly homages à George, whose ‘museum’ of *Excreta Fluxorum*¹ was one of his great delights.

1. George Maciunas, *Excreta Fluxorum* 1973, a clear plastic box with labels containing feces from different animals and a white marble; Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth College, George Maciunas Memorial Collection, Gift of John Cage, illustrated in *Fluxus and the Essential Questions of Life*, Jacquelynn Baas, Ed., Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2011, p. 130.



‘Ceremonial Transfer:

Excreta of Royal Dynastic Rabbit’

Figure 58. discovered 1984; assembled 2012
lotus pod, rabbit scat, glass tube

Photos, this page: Cai Xi Silver.

It represents a non-aquatic mortuary conveyance (sun boat) carrying the sacred scat of the favorite rabbit of the deceased eldest son of the obscure and short-lived pharaoh, Phthui the First, in solemn procession to its proper location for interment.

Harrumph!

God is a slob -

My prayers lie ungraded on His desk
I waited for Him an hour
In each of three churches!

. . . He doesn't keep appointments
Either

1988

NOTE:

Divinity seems to me so complete and all-encompassing and essential (as opposed to particular) in nature, that to ascribe a gender and a personality to the divine must be an impudent and limiting exercise, irrelevant, born of human need, not from a fine-grained perception of reality. It is no longer possible for me to refer to "God" or "Him."

Normally, now, I spell the word "Godde" which is open-ended, neither masculine nor feminine. It is closer to the Anglo-Saxon Gode, which meant both 'deity' and 'good.' In writing, I get around the personal pronoun any which way I can.

Here, the device of personification is deliberately invoked to point fun at my own pretended (and pretentious) delusion of reference.

Nye Ffarrabas
1988

At the Bottom of the Well



Figure 59. mixed media, 1970s - 2014.
Photo: Nye Ffarrabas.

At the Bottom of the Well had quite a lengthy evolution, from the '70s when I was training as a psychotherapist. It emerged out of some personal growth work, a guided meditation about clearing out old 'debris' that was clogging one's 'well.' What I saw when the (virtual) water had cleared was the object at the bottom of the tube. Instead of the usual workings of a kaleidoscope, I fused the bottom ring so that light always comes in to illuminate the treasure at the bottom of the well.

Wounded Healer, Healing

1991

I am the wounded healer:

In my toe a woman struggling to get out

Stand on her own feet

Powerful as mud ~

Building-brick ~

Mortar to the world ~

Powerful as dance

Drumming joy into the brave earth:

In my low back a worker wrangling with her chains

Rebel warrior challenging herself

Fierce as a farrier

Raging to smash the manacles she bought

Wrought, clamped to her own ankles ~

Stretching to release the work

The real work

The true and only work

From bondage:

And in my gut

Storehouse of worn-out dunce-caps and clown shoes

Terrors and admonitions

Fouled tinfoil balls

Wound ends of string too small for use ~

Pockets of unexamined yesterdays

And dread tomorrows

Rusted promises, knicked pride

Trashed ventures

Lopsided valentines ~

Ghost inventory

Long destined for compost or midden

Ready to purge and heal:

Inside my neck

Crackling with leashed lightning

I'm seeking the link ~

The downward and upward

Simultaneous strike ~

To be myself healed and safe conduit

Instantly ready when called

For remedy:

Inside my skull

Where mad cicadas shrill

Strident, incessant, and irrelevant ~

Where fog blurs sight

Confounding thought

And memory slides through widening cracks

Skydiving to hell ~

My will still stirs

Insisting upon life:

And in my loins, hands, throat, and heart

Hurt voices mend

Faltering and breaking into light ~

Strong, passionate

Accepting, delicate, skilful ~

Strand-by-strand fashioning

Garments of sound

Cantos of touch

Silk webs of warmth

Gracenotes of cherishing

Sixty

to Johnny Pesky, Peggy Lee,
Margaret Sanger, A.J. Muste

You? Sixty? *What?* I can't believe it!

If I were sixty, then would I
Walk with a halt? In sensible shoes
Use a cane? Would my
Hair show a decent modicum of white?
My pains, my wrinkles, fears, and flab
Be scars of honorable struggles lost and won
Not character disorders to discount me with?
My unemployment, loneliness, quarrels,
The tunes I hum, ball-players' names I know,
History I've seen making and unmaking
Fit into an acceptable, convenient Context?
Would that give you an easy way
To relegate my politics, my foibles,
My impossible clothes to eccentric dottiness
And shrug the whole thing off as an upstairs joke?
I am. I do. They are . . .
Dismiss me if you dare.

1992

Things I Can't Remember

Phone numbers
The exact noun
Which thing does what
How to get there from here
The recipe for lace cookies
What it was I wanted
What I planned to do today
Where the hell I left the whatchamacallits
How to plant hooks in the ceiling
The name of this person I can't quite describe
The colors of lovers' eyes
What I wanted to say to her before she died
Which came first

1992

Fall Midden

The compost castle, like a second body
Garners weathered leaves in silent pockets;
Tossed in the garbage by her own hand
Rotted remains parade infinite shapes.

Accommodating squash has volunteered
Gently among the fatal roses. Corn husks
Tattle to chilly eggshells;
Spent coffeegrounds tell all.

Tailings transmute relentlessly
In waves of sacred wind.

1992

Feud

At the edge of black and white
I laid down my hate
Why are we talking this way?
I have no quarrel with you.

1992

from *In the AIDS Cauldron*, 1984-1993

Striking the Colors

In memoriam, Fritz Hewitt

1.

Last week the weather broke, and spring
Fell in a sodden lump, flat on its ass
Unceremonious, on threadbare grass
Between grit snowbanks. Wintered-over things
Churned in the mud museum. On her axis
Earth-Mom rolled belly-up in roadside weeds
And I made inventory of a year's misdeeds
Rankling, rebellious, deskbound, doing taxes.

Meanwhile, your body dwindled across town
Focus of all our thoughts as you wound down;
Riotous, that sparrow day sailed by
Sliding toward West Bratt, leaving a fine
Delectable imp of a nail-paring new moon
A lone, last brightness in the indigo sky.

Nemesis

(for Robert S.)

Miss Perfect slinks through doors, sidewise
Tight black cocktail sheath and
Stiletto heels: she's got what it
Takes to turn all eyes, and, man
You know it. Hypnotiz-
ing all the guys, across the humid room
She's picked her mark. He stops to spark
His Bic. Her eyebrows arch
A small smile flickering
Eyes bleak as sharks', the air
Snapping in code: "Who touches, dies" -
All the come-hither of an electric fence
Heart-stopping, razor-sharp, intense
As breath; raising my hackles.
Miss Perfect: Death.

2.

You played the most heart-stopping hide and seek
Each time I came to see you all last week
I'd clump upstairs - and there you wouldn't be
Gave me a turn, you did - or two - or three

But 'round some further corner, there was you
Moved to another room, another view
With Gin-gin, curly beast, and faithful Ted
Growling when we approached his master's bed

In all the goings-on, what did you think of us
In and out - all hours - non-stop fuss
Bedpans and candles, feasts, stories, and laughter
Stored up against all the sad nights, hereafter?

Busy, we were, inventing all the ways
We could, to cram into those haggard days
Lost time with you. Yet, in the end
You have outwitted time, dear magic friend

And 'round some further corner, you may be
Admiring a view that we can't see -
Outrageous, tender, visionary, clever,
Brave, brilliant, right-on Fritz, you're ours forever



Figure 60. *Solidarity with P.W.A.'s* (People With AIDS). Design by Nye Ffarrabas, 1984-1993.

Sawmill

When I was,
Give-or-take, five
There was a sawmill
On my father's place
What for? I wasn't told
Where? Down beside
The barn. It stood
Two storeys
High, and light
Came through cracks
In the tar
paper siding.
Men I didn't know
Worked there,
Serious and sweaty –
Shirts off
Hanging
Down around
Their belts ~
When they talk
They shout loud
Above the clanking
Donkey engine
Between times
Logs hitting
The whizzing blade
Scream out
Insisting everybody
Stop and listen
To the ear-split
Cry of the wood
Ripped longways.
Men pull the limber boards
Slap them on piles
Smelling like fresh meat
In the sun
And chunk the scrap
In another pile. Watching,
My best friend Mary said:
If you roll your eyes
As far as you can
Straight up into your head,
They get stuck, up there,
And you'd be blind.

1993

Cider Press

When summer's over and grass
Smells brittle-dry, earth and goldenrod
And grapes are rounding up
Fat, purple, split, and irresistible
To yellow-jackets, along the south-west
Angle of the porch ~
Then, there's a sting in the sun's
Wallop, a stirring in the air
As though revived by water
Which is not, in fact, anywhere near ~
And old men stand about
In the shed next to the barn, bumping
Rumbling apples down the big, square wooden hopper
Out of bushels, shoulder high
Turning the rust-brown crank
Over and over with a rhythm as old
As mill stones grinding corn ~
And the gush of new cider
Rattles our senses . . .
Over the edge to cartwheel frenzy
Little girls run meteor showers
Round and round the barn making
Old men's tempers short, nervous, and testy

1993

Interspecies

This morning, in the yard, a scene:
Feature, if you will,
Small Pipit crouched by the woodpile
Staring intently off, stage right.
I stoop to pet her fur; she twitches
Ear, and then tail, busily, crossly
Continuing to stare:

Aha! That was at
Mikey, the downstairs fellow - longhaired,
Twice her size, part cooncat, whiskers
Longer than Godde (if Godde has whiskers),
Lying longside the cellar window, smirking,
Next to a squirrel, dead.
"Oh, Mikey," sez I,
Mighty hunter!" - hunkering down for a closer look
And Mikey sings from his bowels
A bitter warning.

Pipit, emboldened,
Pads in my shadow, crooning a challenge
Obligato.

Mikey replies.
Unspeakable exchange!
Charge, countercharge! Diplomatic relations
Strained to the snapping point! U.N. observer
Retires in confusion.... What if he was
No clever huntsman, but a common thief?
Was the catch Pipit's?

What did I know
Of cat dealings; blundering into
Their delicate, fraught balance
With muddy preconceptions?
Retreating to the clothesline, I left them
To themselves, only to find, perched on the chimney
Of the neighbor's kitchen el, another squirrel
Dancing up and down, screaming,
Her small, grey body gone beyond fear
To paroxysms of red rage and grief.
Here was Frontline News, in small,
A backyard Bosnia: treachery, murder,
Pillage and politics -

The widow at the barricades
For all the world to hear, and the blundering American,
Full of wouldbegood intentions....

1993

Kitchen Windowsill

this sunny shelf proliferates rememberings
dug from an old farm midden
definite and indefinite articles
picked up at a yard sale

dug from an old farm midden ~
a small magnesia bottle, blue as eternity
picked up at a yard sale
what's this, standing off-kilter?

a small magnesia bottle, blue as eternity
I used to balance eggs on plates ~
what's this, standing off-kilter
small hole in the center; I only surmise

I used to balance eggs on plates ~
a party game? a spiritual discipline?
I only surmise. small hole in the center
why saved, no longer known

a party game? a spiritual discipline . . . ?
definite and indefinite articles
why saved, no longer known
this sunny shelf proliferates remembering

1993



Figure 61. Kitchen Windowsill. 1993.

Judson, October '95

Clear hard daylight slams through dusty arches;
Plexiglas has replased the stained-glass panels, all but two.
The east wall stands naked of mystery
Plain and bereft, postmenopausal face.

From preachers' mouths issue dialog streams, wordsruntogether
Trenchantandtantalizing, allbutunintelligible
Layers that reverb and ebb, flux, chuckle.
We sing: I leave you there do not despair.

The sun has ducked behind the cornice. I'm waiting.
The hour winds down . . . and I'm waiting
Standing around talking hello and so forth Waiting
As sun's sweet yellow fingers pick the lock

Slide in the great rose window right at home
Filigree, flowers, iconic presences
Alive. Sudden. Breath-catching. The circle transforms;
Heart open. Full spectrum. Golden miracle.

1995



Figure 62. *5 Seed Poem*. 1967. seeds, plastic bag, card, mini clipboard. Photo: Cai Xi Silver

Nye, on *5 Seed Poem*

What makes this a poem? “Because I say so” ... the authority of the maker of the piece. That’s a bit high-handed! But consider Duchamp’s *Bottle Drying Rack*, or his *Urinal*, which were taken out of their everyday, utilitarian context and displayed to be seen as art.

A further dimension of the seed poems is that they may be taken out of the context of display as art, and used in cooking, or planted, or donated to hungry mice.

Books of Two Women

After a famine of solitude
I'm blessed: books of two women
Writers of such pure excellence
Have crossed my sky that I am stunned
Stung into silence wide-awake. I know them
Slightly, as it happens in reality
In Reality, however
I know them to the seamless core.
We reach inside me with our long arms bare
Midwifing a calf – plumbing a hamper
Of clotted socks and tumbled underwear –
Drawing the entrails of a cavernous hen
I'm cleansed and dressed in a balm of words
Outside and in. And miraculously, underfoot
That which was queasy, slick, muddy, and treacherous
Forms into trustworthy earth again.

1997

The two women and their books
mentioned in the 1997 poem, above, are

Edith Forbes, *Nowles's Passing*

Martha Ramsey, *Blood Stories*



Figure 63. *Steam Valve*. 1980s. from a series of studies; colored pencil on paper. Photo: Cai Xi Silver.

Figure 64. *Frog*. 1946. ceramics. Photo: Cai Xi Silver.
A friend invited me, as a high school freshman, to come with her to the sculpture studio where she was finishing a ceramics project. She plopped me down with a fist-sized lump of clay and said, "Go for it." A little later, seeing what I was doing, she commented on the way frogs' heels are, with respect to their knees. A few days after this, we coated him with green glaze, and after firing, he turned out brown.



New Year's Haiku

Goose fly southward, hedgehog gnaw

Who knows how many snowflakes

Before spring?

1961

Kicking Moon

Low-lying fog bank

And our moon ~ kicking her way

Out of the blankets

1999

Note To My Landlord

The Mississippi

Winds slowly across the floor

Cold water pipe leaks

2011

Before Spring

Grey squirrels courting

Cavorting in the tree tops ~

Oh, envy! *Envy!*

2011

Aww, Moon!

Moon! Don't dance like that
Prancing in an' out the trees ~
I'm tryin' to drive

Hey, Moon, I see you ~
Your belly bigger 'n mine:
When your baby due?

I can't remember
Sky color or how windy . . .
Just your "welcome" smile

Don't get me started ~
Without even touching me
I'm turned inside-out

All you have to do
Raise your head and gaze at me . . .
Already I'm melting

Rainbow Bridge waiting
Over the chasm of Styx ~
Let's cross together

2012

In Favor

Conscious awareness:

Nothing is threatened by change

In favor of love.

2011

Magnetos, 1993-2003

Magnetos are a collection of short poems created from single words on magnetic strips, suitable for use on the front of the refrigerator, the side of the washer and dryer, the back of your mind, or wherever.

Over a several-year period, these ranged from very brief (one-liners) to stanzas and took on a surreal quality and a music of their own, which was fun and enormously interesting, and always surprising.

The span of time during which they appeared was, approximately, from 1993 to 2003 . . . although one never knows when another one might pop up.

Beauty

beauty and I

shine like a chain storm

in my language garden

Behind the Dream

How has the instant moment gone

From egg - to time - to knife ~

How is the fragile moment gained

By falling through to life ~

How does the vagrant shadow pass

From here - to near - to seem ~

I still would sit and ponder it

And see behind the dream.

Lost Next

(Uncatena Bridge)

no water now

gone underneath

delectable bridge

run out all swirls and teacups

between fish shadow

and memory's edge

down to the luscious garden

of the sea

Summer Rose

The summer rose with flooding moon

From shadow up to gone

I have no sea to pound me smooth

Shine always after on

These days would shake enormous time

And drive the iron pink

I sit & chant & stop & rhyme

And watch the puppy think

I will a vision like none here

I sweat and beat the bed

I still do like my language bare

And am not rusted yet.

A Memory of Ice

Who can remember ice?
Ice is the image in my mind
Of forgetting --
The image of broken shards --
Of jaggedness and sharp ends slicing

Who can remember ice?
When the mind's heat comes to bear
It deliquesces
And vanishes down the crack
At the center of the table into the earth

Remember ice?
Ice is where memory stops
Memory's action.
As the mind slows to a crawl
It shines. It splinters into gleaming fragments

Remember. Now. Remember.
As the mind slows, freezes, splinters
Some new thing
As lethal, fragile, strong
And terrible as ice is emerging

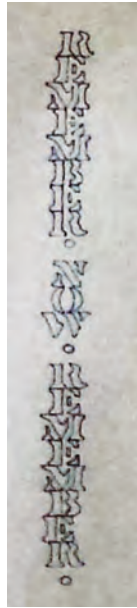
November 2001

Figure 65. *A Memory of Ice*. wall piece. fabric, wood, ink stencils, 2001.

Figure 66. detail: *Remember Now Remember*.

Figure 67. detail: *It Deliquesces*

Photos this page: Adam Silver.



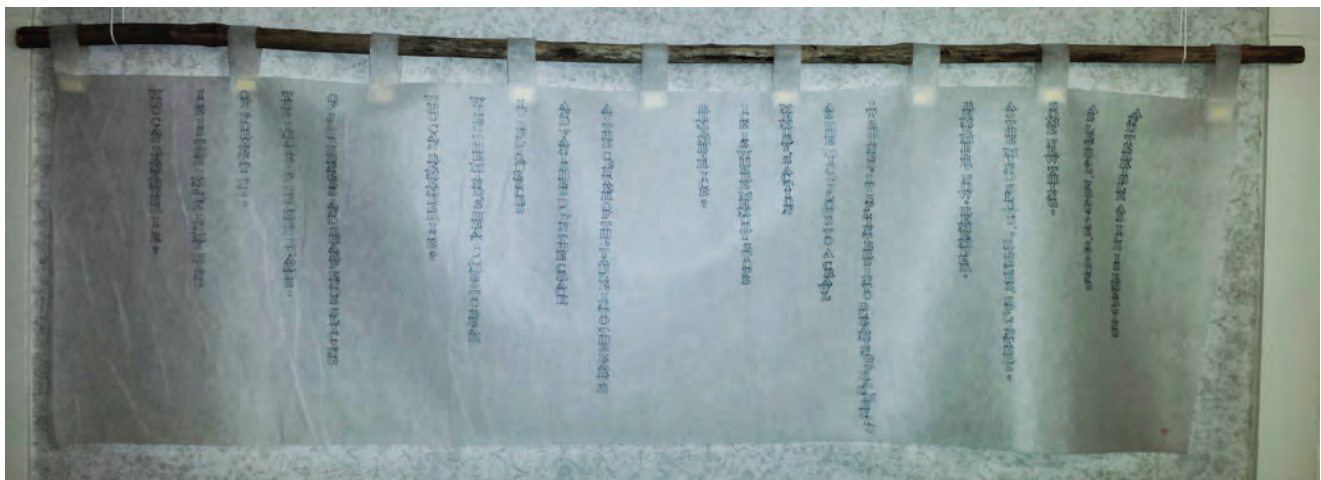
Doors

When static crackles in my mind
Doors bang shut, doors creak open
Constant and belabored
For no apparent reason

When my mind's a quiet field
Doors close and open gently
Of themselves
All the time

It's something of a wonder
How I keep on slamming
Harsh doors of habit
On my thumb

2001



Skin the Cat

In the hall of mirrors
 Memory rounds the corners
 Möbius twists the echoes
 Showing me me, inside-out

Memory rounds the corners
 Suddenly showing you you
 Showing me me, inside-out
 In tension, uncertain

Suddenly showing you you
 Reaching as far as we can
 Intention uncertain
 We pass on the other side

Reaching as far as we can
 Each time we meet
 We pass on the other side
 Approaching / retreating

Each time we meet
 Möbius twists the echoes
 Reproaching / attrition
 In the hall of mirrors

1993

Warm is a Color

Warm is a color I smell
 As I walk past the woodstove
 In the night-drafty parlor
 Ready for bed

As I walk past the woodstove
 Drinking a calming tea
 Ready for bed
 Shades of dead lovers

Drinking a calming tea
 Lie down beside me
 Shades of dead lovers
 Dancing along the wall

Lie down beside me
 I conjure the spirits
 Dancing along the wall
 Soft words caressing

I conjure the spirits
 In the night-drafty parlor
 Soft words caressing
 Warm is a color

2003

Ephemera

Minute fragments, happened on
 Snowflakes captured on the tongue
 Mica glinting in the sun
 Little pieces, one by one

Snowflakes captured on the tongue
 Evanescent, melting, gone
 Little pieces, one by one
 Last year's leaves, wind-blown

Evanescent, melting, gone
 Last year's seeds, scatter-sown
 Last year's leaves, wind-blown
 Channel buoys, tide-rung

Last year's seeds, scatter-sown
 Galactic sparkles, far-flung
 Channel buoys, tide-rung
 Patterns strewn like random stone

Galactic sparkles, far-flung
 Mica glinting in the sun
 Patterns strewn like random stone
 Minute fragments, happened on

2009

Is

Rich is: you think you have the power to do whatever you want

Young is: you don't exactly know what to want

Poor is: you think you can't get anything you want, especially
what other people have

Old is: you can't do this, you can't get that, and, anyway,
no one wants you

Middle is: you work on getting what you are supposed to want
-- if you can

Middle is: you have the power you must use, but not the wisdom
-- yet

Enough is: that's what there is -- make do, with style

Seasoned is: don't envy anyone, don't suffer fools, let well enough
alone, harm none

Accepting is: let go, let go, allow, and bow

Wise is: you, wrapped in the cloud of knowing nothing

2008

Afternoon ~ March

Sweet bite in the air
Afternoon ~ March
But Sun doesn't care
On its cloud-scumbled arch

From fairy-blue air
Sun seeks its bed
Birch twigs still bare
Maple buds red

Geese are returning ~
Their honking on high
Peals in the churning
Evening sky

In the chill meadow
Sun sets its spell
Gold and shadow
Weave well

Against the play
Of Sun's fire
The unvoiced cry
Of soul's desire

Sun slopes burning
Deep west
I linger yearning
For rest ~ rest

2009

Be - All

Before what was created was created ~

Before Time was ~

Beyond the where of Where

Away outside of any here at all

Before, even, there was creator

Or notion of creating

Or any thing or doing ~

Before beginning, stars, or vastness ~

Yes, before word

Or wordsmith ~

Was the immensity of All

And, because no thing, Nothing.

Still as mouse in hidey-hole ~

Where there is neither mouse nor hole

Nor any act of hiding and no seeker ~

There is no then, no shall be, and no now.

All being all ~ no darkness and no light

No thinker and no thought

No æther and no ore

No roaring and no silence ~

Oh, love, there is only Love.

2010

I Have These Moments

I have these moments

They come creeping in

When least expected ~

Thieves in broad daylight

They come creeping in

Taking me by surprise

Thieves in broad daylight ~

But with a difference

Taking me by surprise

On tiptoe

But with a difference:

They take nothing away

On tiptoe ~

Bringing me gifts

Taking nothing away

Gifts of rapture and joy

Bringing me gifts

When least expected

Of rapture and luminous joy ~

I have these moments

2010

Chair Piece

Lest We Forget, 2008

Preamble

Once upon a time, in 1966, the mother of a young daughter, with a second child on the way, made a political statement - with a slat-back rocking chair, painted red, and a blue cushion with white stars. Displayed against a white background, it would turn into a 'flag' upon which one could sit. This was at a time when people were being arrested for flag burning, sewing scraps of flags on their clothing, and so on, in protest against an indefensible - and unwinnable - war, into whose ranks men were being drafted to fight, kill, die - or come home maimed for life by a war with which few agreed. During the making of this piece, and although I was not aware that my unborn child was to be a son, the refrain of a World War I song kept running through my mind: "I didn't raise my boy to be a soldier."

The small, sardonic, private protest, called "American Rock #1," went public (without incident) when I included the piece in my first solo show, at the Judson Gallery in NYC, DC '66 - JA '67. The rocker remained in my household, and eventually the woodshed, for many years. The cushion vanished, the seat got frayed, the joints grew rickety, and the paint began to peel. A new war was raging, and it seemed an appropriate time to renew the old symbolic chair.

In 2005, while applying off-white primer, preparatory to the final coat of red, I noticed the curious phenomenon of red streaks showing through the drying paint and found myself musing, "But this is the end of a series! . . . What's the series?" The answer came: An abbreviated history of our country, told in rocking chairs! After that realization, the rest came tumbling out, chair-by-chair. Through this process, my intention is not so much to shock, as to awaken the viewer.



Figure 68. *Chair Piece*. 2008. Installation view. Windham Art Gallery. Photo: Leonard Ragouzeos.



Chair #1. “Betsy”

(image: below, left)

The first chair in this series harks back to our earliest history, a time when we view ourselves as having been resolutely independent, unified in purpose, and earnestly committed to certain principles. The piece is named for Betsy Ross, although that is only meant to evoke the era. No attempt has been made at the starfield’s historical accuracy. The star in the center is there purely for design reasons.

Only the Spirit of ‘76 is implied here, and a patriotism that meant the courage to put your life on the line for your convictions - not just hoping to be seen strutting around in a trio of colors (which could equally well signify any of a number of other countries).



Chair #2: KKK

(*Kinder-Küche-Kirche*; Kennedy-King-Kennedy)

(image, next page)

In my large installation, *Chair Piece*, each of ten chairs (or other seating arrangements) represents some event, aspect, or phase, of United States history. The second in the series, which I call KKK, as its black-on-black implies, evokes the brutal activities and deranged thinking of the deeply-embedded racism of our culture. But as the piece evolved, it became clear to me that KKK also stood for *Kinder, Küche, Kirche* - the Nazi formula for a woman’s “proper place” in society: the nursery, the kitchen, and the church. In all cases, these were custodial functions only, and isolating ones, at that. The real power resided with the man of the household, in every instance.

Thus, I became aware that both readings of these letters were ultimately about white male domination, and that the lot of women - of whatever color - was essentially little different from that of anyone of non-Anglo, or non-European, descent.

Further reflection on the piece revealed the common initial - K - of three recent martyrs to the cause of justice in our country: John F. Kennedy, Rev. Martin Luther King, and Robert F. Kennedy ... the three black stars on the cushion of rocking chair #2.

Above: Figure 69 *Chair Piece*. 2008. Installation view, looking toward the front of the gallery. Windham Art Gallery. Photo: Leonard Ragouzeos.
Below: Figure 70. *Chair #1: Betsy*. Photo: Jeff Baird.



Chair #3. “After-Image” (image: below, left)

Many times, the idea of after-images has occurred to me in a variety of contexts and situations. When you close your eyes after staring fixedly at an object, the retina holds the form and outlines of the thing, but the colors are reversed: red becomes green, white changes to black, and blue morphs into some variant of orange. Thus, with the flag. I wanted, here, to make a statement concerning the many, ‘little brush-fire wars’ we seem to have spent so many years (of my life, at least) engaging in ... one at a time, and sometimes more than one. Of course, these wars are neither small (so small they are not even officially ‘declared!’) nor could they be described as ‘brush-fire’ (meaning a controlled, negligible-sized burn intended to prevent or divert a larger, out-of-control conflagration). Was their father driving his cart to work in a field whose crops had been destroyed by napalm; their mother killed trying to shield her baby daughter from flying glass as windows blew in and walls blew out; or their older brother losing both legs while trying to bring home a jug of water or a little food ... Were these “collateral damage”? Or were they beloved and integral parts of the functioning whole that was a family, now shattered forever?

Look at the stars on the cushion of this chair: They are torn apart and falling to the ground at the bottom of the field. The music in my mind, as I created this piece was the spiritual that goes, “My Lawd, what a mornin’ when de stars begin to fall.” To me, this is the lesson to be learned about violence - the ‘solution’ that only escalates - the eye-for-an-eye mindset that makes blindness the only winner in a zero-sum game ... the problem that can never be resolved at the level at which it was created.

Chair #4: Going Down (Fast!) (image, facing page, above)

(image, facing page, above)

As Chair Piece was taking form in my mind, the economy of this country, and apparently the world, was beginning to tank, with no bottom in sight. I had already dealt with the idealism and fervor of the early days of the formation of our country and the principles on which it stood, or at least toward which it yearned and leaned. (Chair #1) Next, the deep-seated -isms of oppression, by race and gender, and, by implication, by other shibboleths and markers which are used to separate us, one from another (Chair #2). Then came our imperialistic tendencies and the rationalizations that are always used to conceal from minds, which do not want to know, the unpalatable truths we do not want to hear because they interfere with our comfort levels in so many, devious and troublesome ways. (Chair #3) I painted the next chair gold, with a silver cushion on which is seen what is perhaps our most evocative national symbol that we have, the dollar sign. Meanwhile, prosperity was eroding, ‘bubbles’



Figure 71, top: *Chair #2: KKK*. 2008. Photo: Ragouzeos.
Text for *Chair #2* begins page 93.

Figure 72, bottom: *Chair #3: After-Image*. 2008. Photo: Baird.



This page: Above: Figure 73. *Chair #4: Going Down (Fast!)*. 2008. Photo: Baird.
 Below: Figure 74. *Chair #5: The Bones*. 2008. Photo: Ragouzeos.
 Next page: Above: Figure 75. *Chair #6. We The People*. 2008. Photo: Baird.
 Below: Figure 76. *Chair #7. Artful Dodging*. 2008. Photo: Baird.

looked like a regular chair. But when you lifted the seat, there was a potty inside. This chair - or seat - is a particularly beautifully-crafted one of this genre, with two lids, and a receptacle inside, all very tastefully done. I thought it would be perfect to give an overview of the treatment our august document, The Consitution of the United States - the basis of our philosophy of government and of the way it works. So, many of the wooden surfaces of the cube are collaged with portions of a replica of the Constitution itself. The receptical at the heart of the structure

were bursting, and schemes and scams were defrauding the American public of their hard-earned savings and their future dreams. Down-trends were everywhere. At that point, the golden chair with its silver cushion needed some further token of the state of our economy. I switched the rockers and mounted them backwards along with the remark that "We must be off our rockers!"

Chair #5: "The Bones"

Watching the Paint Dry (image: below , left)

This was the first of the Chairs. I didn't know it, at the time. At first, it was a slat-back rocking chair I painted red, put a blue cushion with white stars on the seat, and - setting it in front of a white wall - decided to call it a flag. It was shown, a number of times, in Viet Nam War protest shows, as well as in my first solo show as an artist, at Judson Gallery.

Years later, much the worse for wear, the rattan seat coming apart and the cushion having vanished, I decided an instant makeover was in order. The only oil primer I had on hand was an off-white color, applied on a lovely out-door day in late summer. Lolling at a picnic table nearby, watching the paint dry, waiting for the moment when I could apply a fresh coat of red, every so often, I would get up and look it over, hopeful to finish the job before the afternoon was spent. The paint had other ideas. Gradually, it seemed to thin a little, in places, and the older red paint began to subtly show through. It began to remind me of the bones from the butcher for soup, or a treat for the dog. The red starting to show through the white, it reminded me of the surface of bone.

Chair #6: We The People

(image: next page)

Back in the old days, when it was too dark and cold and snowy to make a trip to the outhouse, there would be a chair in the cold back ell.¹ At least, it

- a basin, not a potty - names five ways that the Constitution is being, or has already been, eviscerated by political machinations. Created in 2008, I think it would not be hard, at this point, to add another five to the swirling phrases which appear to be on their way down the pipe of no return.

1. <http://www.oed.com/viewdictionaryentry/Entry/60511> "ell, n.1". OED Online. December 2011. Oxford University Press.; <http://www.thefreedictionary.com/ell>

Chair #7: Artful Dodging

(image: below)

Stolen Elections. This business of voting for the candidate of your choice seems very simple and straight-forward ... until you begin to realize the multifarious ways in which that right - that obligation of citizenship - has been thwarted over the years: the poll tax, the literacy tests, the requirement to show an official photo ID (such as a driver's license which many impoverished people are unable to afford), or the ruse employed in Florida and elsewhere in the year 2000, which was to fail to clean out the accumulated paper circles - the 'chads' - from previous elections, so that when a



Figure 75: Chair #6 - *We The People*. 2008. Text begins on page 95.



candidate was selected, the tube, being full, was unable to perforate the ballot properly, resulting in dented paper, or half-cut circles ('hanging chads'), and so forth, which biased vote counters refused to allow as valid votes. This, and the radical redistricting of electoral territories, and the practice of pretending to run out of ballots - but more would be coming 'as soon as possible,' when people, taking time away from their jobs could not wait any longer, but were told of another (fictitious) polling place where they could go to vote ... or that they could come back the next day and cast their ballot (a bald-faced lie) ... or that sacks of ballots from certain Democratic neighborhoods had 'mysteriously disappeared', and other such stories, voters were disenfranchised, and elections stolen right from under their (and our) very noses. Nor is this only a tale of past infractions.

The latest, just in time for the 2014 elections, is to shut down all the public toilets at polling places, so that a man or woman, with little time to vote, in the first place, would have to leave their place in line if they had to find a bathroom - and then face

the choice of rejoining the line at the back, or going back to work without voting.

This is the frustration that manifests in the chair marked **VOTE** with the toilet paper marked **BALLOT**, on each square, that snakes down through a slot in the seat, and down into a bedpan marked **CHADS**, in front and the name of a particularly suspect manufacturer of voting machines marked **DIE** on one side, and **BOLD**, on the other.

Chair #8: Mirror, Mirror... (image: right)

This one is about Earth's environment in the midst of climate change. Prominent in the tableau is a stool, upon a cloth approximating dry, cracked, and unarable soil. There is a dunce cap sitting on it on the stool. On the floor, beneath, sits a cardboard terrestrial globe in two parts. One hemisphere has a mini rocking chair in it with a dead potted plant sitting in the hole of a child's toy potty chair. The other half is simply sitting there with a large footprint denting its half-round form. Later additions: From a pipe, beneath the stool, is a representation of an oil spill, spreading black and ugly, across the floor; and the gauzy blue sky of fabric is obscured by a gauzy grey haze



Facing page, lower left: Figure 76. *Chair #7. Artful Dodger.*

This page, above: Figure 77, *Chair #8. Mirror, Mirror...*
Left: Figure 78. *Chair #9. Sanctity.*
Photography: Jeff Baird.

that hangs ominously beneath it, casting a dismal pall over all. A poem by Nye Ffarrabas hangs on the wall. It is a pantom called, *At Risk Alaska* (next page).

Chair #9: Sanctity (image: left)



Here is the piece that almost kept me out of the Windham Art Gallery show, in 2008. It shows an infant's high chair made of sturdy oak, rigged as an electric chair. WHY? The circles on the wall explain. Each one is painted with a red circle and a slash - just like no parking signs, except that every one has a list of social programs, fairness practices, 'entitlements,' and other ways that our society has thought up to equalize (a little) the gross unfairness of enormous disparities of wealth and other measures of that sort to keep desperation and penury in check. Once these safety nets are gutted, the meaning of the execution high chair is simply that, barring assistance and fair practice, for many in America life is a straight line - from the cradle to 'The Chair.'

A pantoum to accompany the installation for
Chair #8, *Mirror, Mirror ...*

At Risk Alaska

to Howard Rock (Sikvoan Weyahok)

How do we do it - time after shameless time
Pipelines erase old migratory tracks
Oil-soaked waters, murky skies, fouled soil
Bird nesting interrupted and despoiled

Pipelines erase old migratory tracks
Caribou, bear, lost on their own home ground
Bird nesting interrupted and despoiled
Indigenous peoples, birthright stolen, starve

Caribou, bear, lost on their own home ground
Proud hunters turning home with empty hands
Indigenous peoples, birthright stolen, starve
Drills and spills, explosions, racket, clatter
Proud hunters turning home with empty hands
Drowned, the rhythm of ordinary life
Drills and spills, explosions, racket, clatter
Torn, the profound and holy silences

Drowned, the rhythm of ordinary life
Oil-soaked waters, murky skies, fouled soil
Torn, the profound and holy silences
How do we do it - time after shameless time

2008



Chair #10: Gitmo

And so we come to the last one in the exhibit: Gitmo (The U.S. internment camp for terrorist suspects - many never even charged - located at Guantanamo, Cuba. A delicate, graceful antique rocking chair sits in the last of these locations. Very simply, one is invited to lift the velour lid and look inside. (Well, maybe not quite so simply; the invitation is framed in one of those frames meant to surround a license plate on a car - this one featuring simulated barbed wire.) Looking within, one sees a bedpan lined with a ring of barbed wire framing the inlooking visitor, whose face is reflected from a mirror at the bottom of the pan. Seen one way, it is a crown of thorns; but in another, it is oneself one sees as a prisoner at Gitmo ... or as one of the jailors ... or simply as the citizen one is, who has contributed to this, and the other awful sites of torture and inhumanity around the world, if only by our silence - as complicity.



Above: Figure 79. *Chair #10. Gitmo*. 2008.
Left: Figure 80. *Chair #10. Gitmo*. [close-up of bedpan] 2008.
Photography: Jeff Baird.

September Morning

And summer's over. Quick!

The air suddenly

Manifests crossing guards ~

Hoodies proliferate ~

Sharp sounds enliven. . . .

Anything that moves

Zings with the urgency

Of reaching destinations:

Safe haven under the porch ~

Last harvest before frost ~

Crows' scurrilous litigation

Over unmappable turf ~

Even thin clouds spin finer. . . .

Who sits on a rock to rest

Finds, buttock-wide,

The impress and stiff chill

Of what's ahead

2011

So Long

So long we've known each other

So little at a time

A grain of knowing, here

A shard of trust

A gleam of mischief in the eye

A wisp of dark hair - grey now -

Brushed from your face

With backs of fingers, there . . .

All the while holding forth

On an important theme

Freely giving your truth to those

Who would come and learn

And again - life after life

Tantalized by the *almost* in our encounters

So long to reach full recognition

That - circumstances and hard luck taking their toll -

We can only embrace and wish

And dream . . . and dream . . .

So long we've known each other:

By little clues

Grand moments

Awkward pauses . . .

Brilliant slices of insight

A quickening of breath

A hand extended

A tender smile

A setting sun

A quietness

A prayer

A touch

A sigh

Ah. . .

2012

A Poem Is

A poem is a ferment, an undigested lump
That howls in my bowels to be set free
Longing for clean air it has no idea how to use . . .

An explosion in a box, lacing the sky with tinsel
A spacecraft blooming like a rose
Raining down pieces of Challenger over the morning sea . . .

Or thoughts drawn out so thin they almost snap
Encountering each other, and, hand-in-hand, waltz off
Into the sunset of an unknown planet . . .

A poem's a vault into new time/space
That's never been before: an acrobat on a trapeze
High-flying in the spotlights . . .

A mind laid open, naked and pulsing
Under the microscope's objective stare . . .

A carpet-sweeper rattling its dutiful course
Over and over and over well-known ground

A pair of flawless chop sticks lying parallel
Across an empty bowl . . .

A poem is the stillness of a heart
That has been recognized

2012

Regarding a Painting of a Very Young Florentine Noblewoman

You see me first
Erupting from the gold
Of my patrician background ~

Or you see the background first
That moves to quicksand me
Into my heritage

Either way, a struggle is in progress:
The band across my brow restraining ~
The hair, a club, hangs down my back

It, too, restrained, bound and immobile
My nostrils tight, chin set
Virgin cheeks tinted ever-so-slightly

And throat, breast, arms so still ~
As silent as the club that guards my back ~
My mouth a perfect riddle

Between obedience and the heartfelt "NO!"
Spoken with perfect force: "I will not marry
That aging prince, however rich and noble ~

"He has no feelings!"
I am carved in stone. Only my eyes betray
The will that's my inheritance, as well

2012



Figure 81.

Flux Valentine. undated. Photo: Nye Ffarrabas.

I was packing to move. Had an old douche bag. The parts of the tube were stuck inside so it looked like a heart. Then the white nozzle looked like Cupid's arrow. So I added 'Be Mine' in vinyl press type.

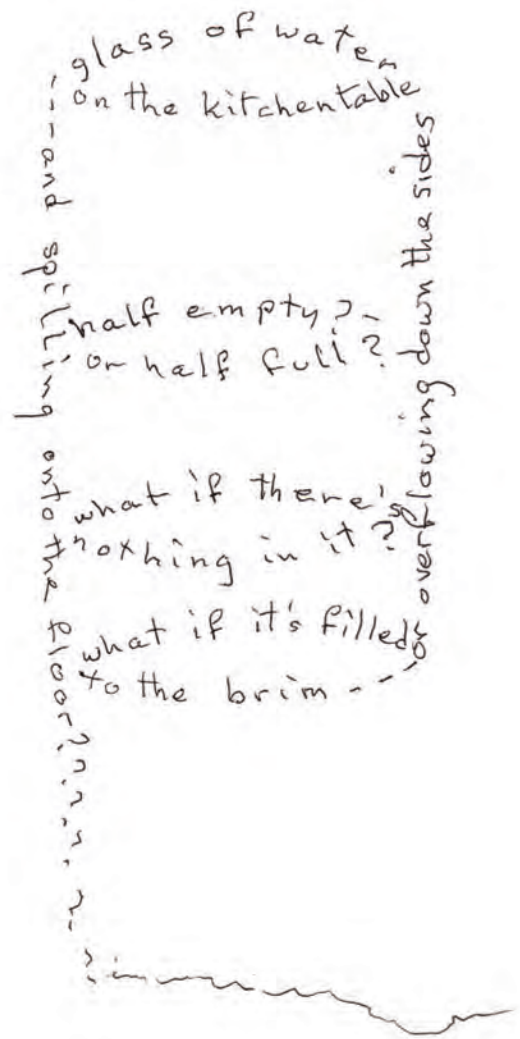


Figure 82.

Concrete Poetry: Glass of Water.
2013-2014.



Figure 83. (left) *Failure to Measure Up*. 2009. found object on wood with plaque. Photo: Cai Xi Silver.

Figure 84 (above) (two views, front and back).

Too Long In The Bucket. 2009. mini scrub brush that has been left too long in a bucket of bleach, with ink writing on the wood backing. Photo: Cai Xi Silver

Figure 85. (below) *G-o-ne*. teapot with found break on ceramic tile. Photo: Nye Ffarrabas.



I had packed the teapot in a box, and when I unpacked it, it was broken. I started playing with it, looking it over, putting it upside down. Then I saw my reflection on the inside and it was upside down. Then I noticed that the white cross-section of the break had the form of an omega, symbolizing endings. Then I thought of “G-o-n-e” being moaned as a terrible loss.

Failure to Measure Up, when I saw it, what it said to me, was autobiographical. Other people saw it differently.

How this started

I made oxtail soup. Then I started playing with the bones. And they started looking like creatures. And then the creatures had stories.



Figure 86, above: *Bison Family Singing* 2013. oxtail bone on wood. Collection of Devin Starlanyl.

Figure 87, below: *Mushing in the Yukon*. 2014. oxtail bone on ceramic tile. Photos, this page: Cai Xi Silver.



Figure 88, above: *"Can I have the keys to the truck tonight - just for tonight - Ple-ase?"* 2014. oxtail bone on wood. Photos, this page: "Cai Xi Silver

Figure 89, below: *The four troll children line up for a photo.* oxtail bone on wood. 2014.



Figure 90, above: *"Hamlet, I am thy father's spirit, doomed for a certain time to roam the earth."* 2009. oxtail bone on slate. Photo: Cai Xi Silver.

Figure 91, below: *Presentation of the Newborn to the Tribe.* oxtail bone on wood. Photo: Nye Ffarrabas.

After Sixty

a dialog

Twenty years on, I'm eighty.

"Think of that! A marvel!
My, you do look great . . ."

(A moment before, you were thinking
Gosh, she should lose weight -
Her legs are lumpy and her mouth
Turns down . . . pains and complaints!
Her hair! If she'd just get new clothes!
The color of that blouse -
All wrong! At her age . . . !)

"But really - you look wonderful" (. . . for eighty!)"

Ask my knees!

"My gosh, I never thought . . . you look so well!"

It is not a disease!

"I can't believe it! Heavens! No way! Nohow!"

So now I am a liar?

"Heck: eighty's the new sixty! Wow!"

HEY! This is how eighty LOOKS!

(Just look at me
And SEE me, idiot, NOW!

Whatever reason would I have to lie"
(And how the young folk wish we'd disappear;
They cancel our reality
With the shared eraser of their fear,
Afraid to see us out in public view
Like anybody else. Because then they're
Forced to look beyond denial and know
What they, too, one day may become.)

I kid you not, the best thing anyone
Has said to me thus far, on the subject was
"You wear it well."

2012

I believe love is the ordering
principle of the universe.
It is expressed in the principal
of cause and effect, which,
in turn, is expressed
in morality
(a civilizing principle)
... yet this, all too easily,
becomes lost
in intellectual constructs
and judgments
and elaborations and rules and
regulations,
losing the love
that was the original impulse.
However,
saying “not with head”
is as foolish
as trying to walk
with only one leg.
One can hop, yes,
but that is an extreme form
of limping:
Hopping is not walking.
Heart without head is folly.
Head without heart
is tyranny.
Balance is the key.

1994

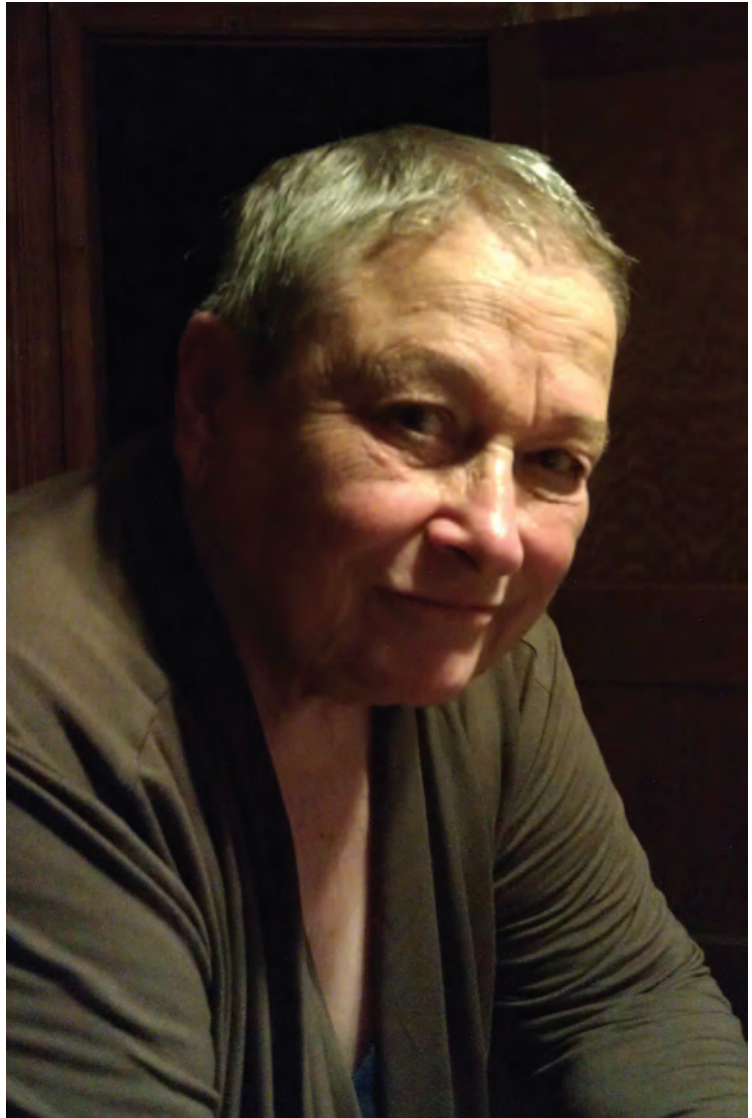


Figure 92. Nye Ffarrabas. Photo by Judith Hill-Weld

Creative work defines itself.
Therefore confront the work.
There will always be critics
eager to fashion opinions for
the lazy and incapable

. . . but what has that to do
with enchantment?¹

1968

1. Included in John Cage's *Notations*,
pp. 241 and 244 (New York: Something
Else Press, 1969) and reprinted here by
permission of Something Else Press

These texts developed over the years and were used in different settings and different arrangements. Gathered all together, They were typed, photographed, projected as slides onto walls. They were also collaged into long scrolls for different arrangements. The scroll format is being used in the 2014 exhibition at C.X. Silver Gallery in Brattleboro as a border trim for the places where the ceiling meets the gallery walls. Some of the texts were used in the *Word Work* mechanical boxes and in the Final Exams.

DEVOTIONAL INSTRUCTIONS ... HAIKU ... EVENT SCORES ... HAPPENINGS ... QUERIES ... FIELD TRIPS ... TEA PARTIES... CONFECTIONS & POTABLES ... FASHION ... EXAMINATIONS ... CONFESSIONS ... LEGAL PROCEEDINGS ... PHYSICAL THERAPY ... COLOR RESEARCH ... HIGH FINANCE ... SIGNAGE ... COMMUNICATIONS ... HOUSEHOLD HINTS ... and more!

1. Look fixedly at an object until it disappears 2. Look diffusedly all around the same object until it reappears ~ ~ ~ Write in black chalk on a black board Erase ~ ~ ~ Friend do not praise me Praise falling sunlight rather Praise the Buddha's smile ~ ~ ~

GREETINGS: Start out slow and low key ... Last-minute preparations on stage before the eyes of the audience ... Keep interrupting yourself from what you are doing to go and greet someone arriving. Chat with them ... Keep on doing this (stage front) ~ ~ ~ Is bleeding in public better than being scared to? ~ ~ ~

LAUNDRER MONEY: Soak paper money Scrub with wet soapy brush on wooden table Rinse Pat dry with towel Clip onto clothesline Allow to dry ~ ~ ~ Is the impractical useless? ~ ~ ~ High city buildings Lean back to see the tops Compared to sky . . . small ~ ~ ~ Be a success! (for a limited time only!) ~ ~ ~ Cold rain on hair and eyelashes ... No protection ~ ~ ~ Help a chess fiend Today! ~ ~ ~ Wipe out the frying pan with a handful of grass ... Plunge knives into clean sand ~ ~ ~

WINTER NIGHT EVENT: Two lie back to back in bed ... Touch bare bottoms ~ ~ ~ Repeat the word "cold" for one hour ~ ~ ~

EVENT WITH FOUR PENCILS: Four dull pencils of any good color The leads are black Write with one pencil Slowly ~ ~ ~ Smell your typewriter Smell your own scalp navel toenail ~ ~ ~ Dilute the _____ [insert the name of your river] with water ~ ~ ~ (for Jackson Mac Low): Make wine or beer ... Make a noise ~ ~ ~

HOUSEHOLD HINT: You can mar the finish of your dining room table and no one will be any the wiser ~ ~ ~

SPRING CLEANING: Go into the forest. Make a sheet of paper ... Use it ... Burn it up ~ ~ ~ When you have seen the sunshine through a jar of honey you do not liken it to other things but other things to it. ~ ~ ~ Wear a new dress with price tag and laundering instructions hanging out especially under the left arm at the top of the zipper.

TEA PARTY (for the A.E.C.): Twelve o'clock. No one. ~ ~ ~ Put a baby to bed. ~ ~ ~ Eat junket in the dark with a fork ~ ~ ~ Knit the eight basic trigrams in a band around a sweater ~ ~ ~

HOUSEHOLD HINT (for Geoff Hendricks): Don't agree unless you agree, don't disagree unless you disagree ~ ~ ~

PEACH METHOD: Inhale in the vicinity of a peach until you have completed ærial ingestion of the entire fruit ~ ~ ~

FIELD TRIP: Take a bunch of daffodils to a librarian ~ ~ ~ Be a potato for several days

HOUSEHOLD HINT: Reserve a drawer exclusively for nuts: pecans hazelnuts almonds in the shell ... or wild nuts: hickories butternuts black walnuts acorns ... Nutcrackers and picks may be included but it might be more discreet to have them partitioned off to one side. ~ ~ ~ Make the world's largest collection of ~~~~~~way lines ~~~~~~ dried waterfalls ~~~~~~ other~~~~~ Fly kites in bed ~ ~ ~

DEVOTIONAL INSTRUCTIONS [posthumous event]: Send four mud pies to Allan Kaprow ~ ~ ~ Freeze punctuation marks in ice cubes ~ ~ ~

DEVOTIONAL INSTRUCTIONS: Soil water ... Water soil ~ ~ ~ A cat may look at a king ... but does it see one? ~ ~ ~ Rewrite Fanny Farmer's Boston Cooking School Cook Book with danger in every recipe ~ ~ ~ Spend one whole afternoon driving around the cloverleaf of a major artery ~ ~ ~ Swim for one hour in your own blood (internal or external) ~ ~ ~

CONFESSION: I was a Salvation Army dropout for the F.B.I. ~ ~ ~ Knit a manhole cover cozy ~ ~ ~ Embed eggs in lucite blocks ~ ~ ~

TEA PARTY: eyecups and sausages ~ ~ ~ Sniff the ground for an hour ... recognize count and tabulate all the scents that you pick up ~ ~ ~

OBJECT OF VENERATION: Make a chess board out of mirrors ... Play with transparent men ~ ~ ~ Never do anything uninteresting (Corollary: never do anything uninterestingly) ~ ~ ~ Go to a movie blindfolded ... listen once through ... Sit through the movie again eyes open, ears plugged ~ ~ ~ How many degree days until Christmas? ~ ~ ~

EGG/TIME EVENT: Embed one hen egg in a plaster cube ... Do not open for 100 years ~ ~ ~ Set your kitchen timer to go off when 100 years is up ~ ~ ~

ART MYSTERY: A group of art experts who were engaged to give a panel discussion before an audience chose to sit on the stage and say nothing ...

The audience stormed, threw things, and demanded their money back ... Who was wrong? ~ ~ ~ Is a sheet of paper neatly folded to fit into an envelope more beautiful than an unfolded sheet? ~ ~ ~ Make a film: at 8000 frames per second ... Play it back ex - tre - e - me - ly slo - ow - ly

EXAMINATION: What good would it do you? ~ Does the end justify the extremes? ~ Is any more air available? ~
Have you committed insecticide today? ~ ~ ~

MOVING MESSAGE DISPLAY: Poems in lights moving around the outside of the Allied Chemical Building in a continuous stream ~ ~ ~

EGG WATCHING: Elementary - Watch an egg boil for four minutes ... Intermediate - Watch an egg being fertilized laid and hatched ...
Advanced - Watch an egg become 100 years old ... Extra credit - Eat ~ ~ ~ (for Ray Johnson:) Blood ices on sticks ~ ~ ~

Q: Are saints and poets antisocial? A: No they are antitemporal: against the times but for the people ~ ~ ~ Observe silence Listen to odorlessness Smell darkness ~ ~ ~

PHYSICAL THERAPY: The waving hand becomes the handkerchief ~

COLOR RESEARCH Save Green Stamps until you are blue in the face ~

NEOJOURNALISMUS (the News in Capsule Form) ... Read the newspaper across the columns instead of down ~ ~ ~

GIVES BIRTH GIVES DEATH CHANGE IS LIFE BREATH ...

EARTH DWELLER HOLY PASSENGER FLASHING LIGHTNING SPOTTED MESSENGER ~ ~ ~

CHILD MUD SNOW MELT MORTAL BLOOD HEARTFELT

HALLELUJAH SUN SONG DARK FAREWELL LONG GONE ~ ~ ~

RETURN: DRY GRASS AND WIND RUN SLIPSHOD OVERLAND WHISTLING ... RETURN ~ ~ ~

MEMENTO MORI ... INGEN PANT INGEN RETUR ~ ~ ~

PEACE ON EARTH GOODWILL TO MEN ... NAPALM VILLAGES FOR FUN AND PROFIT (1966) ~ ~ ~

ONE LITTLE TWO LITTLE THREE LITTLE DRONIES :
FOUR LITTLE FIVE LITTLE SIX LITTLE DRONIES :
SEVEN LITTLE EIGHT LITTLE NINE LITTLE DRONIES : NO ONE LEFT ALIVE! (2013)

YCNEGREME REGNESSAP DETAREPO TIXE ROOD ~ ~ ~

Think of THAT! ~ ~ ~

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